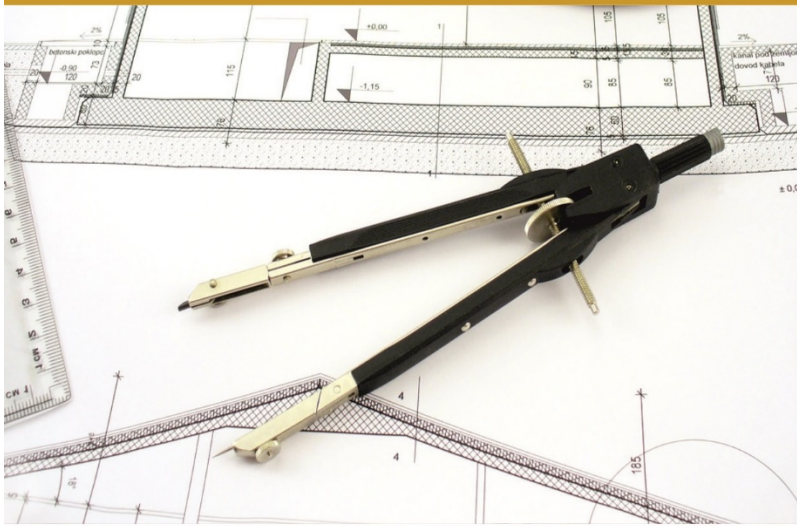


# Statement of Community Involvement



Adopted August 2019



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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 SCI was first adopted in 2006 and updated in 2014. [Regulations](#) which came into effect on 6 April 2018 now require local planning authorities to review their SCI at least once every five years.

This revision of the SCI was prepared in early 2019 to incorporate all of the changes that have taken place since 2014 and was subsequently made available for public consultation between 12 June and 24 July 2019. No further amendments were required in response to the comments received.

The SCI is divided into four sections. The first looks at how we engage with the public and other interested parties when we are producing our Minerals and Waste Local Plans, preparing Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs), or reviewing our Local Plans. We refer to all of this as Planning Policy. The second section looks at how we consult when we are determining planning applications. The third section briefly summarises our limited role in supporting the development of Neighbourhood Plans, while the final section discusses the SCI itself, and the opportunities to be involved in its review.

In addition to anything referred to in this SCI, any consultation or engagement exercise we carry out will also have regard to any relevant corporate policies or statutory requirements including:

- [Equality Act 2010](#)
- [Human Rights Act 1998](#),
- [Freedom of Information Act 2000](#)
- [Environmental Information Regulations 2004](#)
- [Data Protection Act 2018](#), including the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and
- Our [Privacy Notice](#)

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## Section 1: Planning Policy

1. We are required to prepare local development documents (e.g. Minerals and Waste Local Plans) to set out how and where we consider that the area's needs for quarries and waste management facilities should be met. We publish a Minerals and Waste Development Scheme (MWDS) which proposes a timetable for preparing the plans, and we keep this up to date to reflect any changes. We have to consider the opinions of the people and organisations that might be interested in our plan, so we prepare a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) to set 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 objections 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 at each stage in developing a new plan, we publish updates on our web site ([www.staffordshire.gov.uk/planning](http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/planning)) with background information that has helped us to make decisions throughout our plan making process. We also publish [Annual Monitoring Reports](#) on our existing plans, 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 "specific consultation bodies" / "general consultation bodies" specified in in [Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning \(Local Planning\) \(England\) Regulations 2012](#), as well as residents, local interest groups, local organisations and companies who operate in Staffordshire.
5. You do not need to be invited, or to be a member of a group, to respond to a consultation. Anyone can comment on our plans during the consultation periods.



## How do we consult at each stage?

6. [Government Guidance on Plan-making](#) sets out how we should prepare our Minerals and Waste Local Plans, and who we should consult at each stage. The table below shows key stages of preparing a Local Plan and the opportunities to make your views known.

**Table 1: Stages of preparing a Local Plan**

Stage	What we do	How we will consult
<p><b>Plan preparation</b> 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. <a href="#">(Reg. 18 of 2012 Regulations)</a></p>	<p>Gathering evidence. Deciding what to look at in the Local Plan. Developing possible options including sites. Looking at possible social, environmental and economic impacts through the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) process.</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p><b>Draft Plan</b> 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.</p>	<p>Producing the Draft Local Plan. Continuing the SA.</p>	<p>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 via the internet 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.</p>
<p><b>Publication of the Proposed Submission Plan</b> <a href="#">(Reg. 19-20 of 2012 Regulations)</a></p>	<p>Producing the version of the Local Plan that we want the Inspector to examine. Concluding the SA.</p>	<p>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 via the internet from our main office and at 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 Local Plan.</p>

<b>Formal decision making:</b>		
<b>Submission Stage</b> <a href="#">(Reg. 22 of 2012 Regulations)</a>	The Council will send its "submission version" of the Local Plan to the Planning Inspectorate, together with supporting documents, final Sustainability Appraisal report, and all formal representations received at this stage.	
<b>Independent Examination</b> <a href="#">(Section 20 of the Planning &amp; Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, modified by Section 112 of the Localism Act 2011)</a> <a href="#">(Reg 24 of 2012 Regulations)</a>	An independent Inspector will be appointed to examine the Local 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 Local Plan to make it sound. These may require additional consultation.	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 via the internet from our main office and at libraries.
<b>Adoption</b> <a href="#">(Reg 26 of 2012 Regulations)</a>	Council resolve to adopt the Local 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.	"Adoption statement" published with the Local Plan. Where they have requested it, respondents to the Local Plan will be notified when it is adopted.

## Consultation stages for SPDs

7. In addition to the Minerals and Waste Local Plans, we may also produce Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) from time to time. Government guidance on '[Plan-making](#)' explains their role as a material consideration in decision making. They go through a simpler process, with one period of consultation prior to adoption, as summarised in the table below.

**Table 2: Stages of preparing SPDs**

<b>Stage</b>	<b>What we do</b>	<b>How we will consult</b>
<b>SPD preparation</b>	Gathering evidence. Drafting the SPD / Guidance.	Where appropriate, seeking initial views from interested parties.
<b>Public Consultation</b> <a href="#">(Reg 12 &amp; 13 of 2012 Regulations)</a>	Consult on the Draft SPD. Modify the Draft SPD as appropriate.	Draft SPD available on our website with a Consultation Statement. Documents also viewable via the internet from our main office and at libraries. E-mails or letters sent to relevant consultees. Consultation period lasts for a minimum of 4 weeks.
<b>Adoption</b> <a href="#">(Reg 11 &amp; 14 of 2012 Regulations)</a>	Council resolve to adopt the SPD 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.	"Adoption statement" published with the SPD. Copies sent to any person who has asked to be notified.

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## How can you access consultation documents?

8. We publish all of our plan documents on our web site, and only print paper copies when it is absolutely necessary.
9. You can [use our computers](#) free of charge in the reception area of our offices at 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.
10. 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.
11. 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?

12. 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 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.
13. 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.
14. 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”.
15. Paragraph 35 of the [National Planning Policy Framework \(NPPF\)](#) explains that, Plans are “sound” if they are:
  - **Positively prepared** – providing a strategy which, as a minimum, seeks to meet the area’s objectively assessed needs; and is informed by agreements with other authorities, so that unmet need from neighbouring areas is accommodated where it is practical to do so and is consistent with achieving sustainable development;
  - **Justified** – an appropriate strategy, taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence;
  - **Effective** – deliverable over the plan period, and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic matters that have been dealt with rather than deferred, as evidenced by the statement of common ground; and,
  - **Consistent with national policy** – enabling the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in this Framework

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## How do we handle responses?

16. All comments received during the consultation periods will be used to inform the subsequent stages of developing the Local Plan.
17. 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.
18. 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.
19. Comments will normally be made available for anyone to see via our website ([www.staffordshire.gov.uk/planning](http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/planning)).
20. We need to collect and maintain some personal data as we consider consultation responses. The way that we do this is set out in our [Privacy Notice](#) which is available on our website.

## Reviewing Local Plans

21. [Regulation 10A of The Town and Country Planning \(Local Planning\) \(England\) Regulations 2012 \(as amended\)](#) requires us to review our Minerals and Waste Local Plans, and SCI (refer to section 4) at least once every 5 years from their adoption date to ensure that planning policies remain relevant and effectively address the needs of the local community. This involves considering any changes to national policy, local circumstances or our own strategic priorities.
22. [Government Guidance on Plan Making](#) provides more information on how and why plan reviews should be carried out, but the approach that we take on each occasion will depend on how much change we expect to find. We may consult with interested groups or organisations if we need more information, or we may conduct a desk-based assessment using the data that we collect routinely to monitor our Local Plans.
23. At the end of each review, we must decide either that our policies:
  - do not need updating (in which case we must publish our reasons); or
  - need updating (in which case we must update our Minerals and Waste Development Scheme to set out the timetable for this revision and update our policies).
24. We will publish the outcomes of our Local Plan reviews on our website, and where policy updates are required, we will follow the process set out in Table 1 above.



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## Section 2: Consultation on Planning Applications

25. 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. our schools and new road improvement schemes). All other types of planning application (e.g. housing and commercial development) are dealt with by the relevant District/Borough Councils, although they do consult us on certain proposals before they make their final decisions.
26. 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 Planning Practice Guidance, specifically the section on ['Consultation and pre-decision matters'](#) which has links to the relevant legislation.

### Pre-application discussions

27. We encourage developers to talk to officers before submitting planning application and we have introduced a minerals and waste pre-application advice service. Charges apply and vary with the level of information provided. Details are available on our [pre-application advice web page](#). The value of the process is clearly stated in paragraphs 39 - 41 of the [National Planning Policy Framework](#) and in Planning Practice Guidance: ['Before submitting an application'](#)
28. We also encourage applicants and landowners to discuss their proposals with the local community before submitting planning applications.
29. 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.
30. Applicants who do decide to undertake pre-application community consultation before submitting a planning 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.
31. Pre-application consultation does not change the way we consult the public and other organisations when we receive a planning application.

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## How would you find out about a planning application in your area?

32. In accordance with the [Town and Country Planning \(Development Management Procedure\) \(England\) Order 2015](#) and the [Town and Country Planning \(Environmental Impact Assessment\) Regulations 2017](#), 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 or near to 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. 25](#))
    - 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; and,
  - write to neighbours likely to be directly affected by the proposals.
33. You can [use our computers](#) free of charge in the reception area of our offices at 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 / Borough Council offices via their Planning Register.
34. Finally, if access to the internet is not possible, we can provide paper copies of the 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.

## Who do we consult?

35. 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 detailed requirements are set out in legislation, and explained in Planning Practice Guidance: ["Consultation and pre-decision matters"](#).
36. 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?

37. Anyone can comment on a planning application: you do not have to wait to be asked.

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38. 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](mailto:planning@staffordshire.gov.uk).

You can also write to us at:

Planning, Policy & Development Control  
Staffordshire County Council  
2 Staffordshire Place  
Tipping Street  
Stafford  
ST16 2DH

### **How long do you have to comment on a planning application?**

39. The standard consultation period is 21 days, or 30 days when the planning application is accompanied by an Environmental Statement (ES) (and a further 30 days when additional information is submitted in support of the ES). The period is extended to allow for bank holidays. The requirements are set out in legislation, and explained in Planning Practice Guidance: '[Consultation and pre-decision matters](#)' and the [Town and Country Planning \(Environmental Impact Assessment\) Regulations 2017 \(Regulation 19\)](#). In addition, it is our practice to re-consult and allow a further 14 days in which to comment if significant changes are made to any planning proposals which are under consideration.

### **How do we make planning decisions?**

40. The comments and specialist advice we receive through the notification and consultation process are used to help us assess the impact of the development and the need for planning conditions to minimise the impact of the development. Alternatively, they may be used to identify reasons why planning permission should not be granted.
41. Planning applications are either determined by the [Planning Committee](#), or by planning officers in accordance with [Delegated Powers](#). Planning Practice Guidance: '[Determining a planning application](#)' explains that decisions must be made in accordance with the [Development Plan](#) unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
42. The Planning Committee normally meets every two months. [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 on the [Planning Committee web page](#)
43. Public speaking is allowed at Planning Committee and Committee meetings are [webcast](#) live and archive recording are available for 12 months.
44. 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 on the proposals. The Committee will give reasons for all its decisions which will be recorded in the minutes and will be made available to view via our website - [www.staffordshire.gov.uk/planning](http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/planning).

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## How do we let people know about our decisions?

45. We notify all those who made representations on a proposal either in writing, by email, or in some instances via the local press.
46. All decisions are recorded on the Planning Register held by the relevant District/Borough Council. Copies of decision notices are also published on our on-line [Applications Register](#).

## Section 3: Neighbourhood Plans

47. [Neighbourhood Planning](#) gives communities the power to shape, direct and deliver sustainable development in their area. Neighbourhood Plans have to be in general conformity with the strategic policies contained in the Development Plan, and that includes policies in the Minerals and Waste Local Plans.
48. The County Council has no specific legislative duties in relation to Neighbourhood Planning, so the first point of contact for communities interested in preparing a Neighbourhood Plan should be their District / Borough Council. However, we do provide consultation responses on strategic matters where policies or allocations are likely to have an impact on one or more of our statutory responsibilities.

## Section 4: Keeping the SCI up to date

49. As mentioned earlier, [Regulation 10A of The Town and Country Planning \(Local Planning\) \(England\) Regulations 2012 \(as amended\)](#) requires us to review SCI at least once every 5 years from the adoption date to ensure that it remains relevant and effective in ensuring community involvement at all stages of the planning process.
50. We will keep track of any changes in legislation, guidance or local circumstances that may affect our SCI, and we will report on these in our Annual Monitoring Report. Should significant changes arise, we will consider an earlier review to accommodate such changes.



Planning, Policy & Development Control  
Staffordshire County Council  
2 Staffordshire Place  
Tipping Street  
Stafford  
ST16 2DH  
E-mail: [planning@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:planning@staffordshire.gov.uk)