

**West Suffolk
Statement of Community Involvement
(SCI)**

December 2018



Content

Our Approach to Community Involvement

Introduction

Why are we producing a new Statement of Community Involvement?

Principles of Engagement

Part 1 – Plan Making

1.1 How we produce our Local Plan documents

1.2 Procedure for producing Local Plans

1.3 Supporting the Neighbourhood Planning process

1.4 How we produce our Supplementary Planning Documents

1.5 How we plan strategically across local boundaries

1.6 Our methods for community engagement

Part 2 – Planning Applications

2.1 The pre-application stage

2.2 Publicising our planning applications

2.3 How we will engage with our communities

2.4 How you can give us feedback and comment on a planning application

Part 3 - Monitoring and reviewing this Statement of Community Involvement

Part 4 - Obtaining alternative planning advice

Appendix A: Acronyms

Appendix B: Glossary

Appendix C: Principal Council Offices

Our Approach to Community Involvement

This statement is part of a wider commitment to create and maintain effective working relationships with all sectors of the community, based on trust, openness and constructive challenge. Consulting and engaging with local people is essential in helping us to develop quality services.

At the time of writing Forest Heath District Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Council are politically separate local authorities which share a joint planning service. However from April 2019 the authorities will join to form a single council for West Suffolk. This document has been written in that context and refers to West Suffolk as the local planning authority area.

This document sets out how we will consult and engage with you in relation to the majority of our planning functions. Getting community engagement right is a challenging task, but involving more people actively in decision-making and feeling informed about issues that affect them, is our primary aim.

We would urge you, as residents, businesses and stakeholders, to use this Statement and the protocols set out within it, to hold the local planning authority to account and ensure that all local people have sufficient opportunities to have their say. It is recognised that consultation and engagement activities are constantly evolving and this Statement will be re-visited at regular intervals to ensure it is fully up-to-date and reflects local and national priorities, practices and policies.

Introduction

This Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) sets out:

- our **vision and strategy** for involving the wider community in the preparation of new planning documents; and
- how our communities can become **more involved** and have a **greater say** in the handling of the planning applications that we receive.

The SCI is effectively a statement of our intent to seek positive and meaningful engagement with our local communities in the delivery and improvement of all of our planning services.

The consultation activities set out in this SCI are a minimum requirement. This document, gives an assurance to communities and other key stakeholders about what they can expect from us in terms of consultation and involvement. We may however, undertake additional consultation activities; if it is considered to be necessary depending on the scale and impact of a particular project, proposal or, document.

We will regularly monitor whether this document is aligned with the latest planning policy, legislation and guidance and whether the procedures set out in this statement are achieving a representative level of involvement across all sections of the community and will review the document if necessary.

Why are we producing a new Statement of Community Involvement?

Our shared vision and strategic priorities

The West Suffolk Strategic Framework (2018-2020) makes a commitment to review our SCI. The Council aims to put the interests of local communities at the heart of everything it does and believes in local decisions and local actions for the benefit of local communities.

The Strategic Framework outlines our shared vision and strategic priorities on which we intend to concentrate our efforts: increased opportunities for economic growth, resilient families and communities that are healthy and active, and homes for our communities. Communities and businesses have an important part to play in helping to deliver this vision by getting involved in the planning process at both the local plan-making stage and at the planning application stage.

Legislative changes

There have also been a number of changes in planning legislation since the adoption of our first joint SCI in 2014 and this review is therefore vital to ensure that we are meeting the latest statutory requirements and doing all we reasonably can to encourage involvement in the planning process.

Recent legislative changes include:

- Neighbourhood Planning Act 2017 Regulations
- The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2017
- National Planning Policy Framework (2018) and associated guidance
- The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015
- The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Amendment) (England) Order 2018

Keeping communities informed of evidence gathering and plan-making:

Local planning authorities must set out in their SCI how they will engage communities on the preliminary stages of plan-making, and specifically the evidence gathering / survey stage. A Local Development Scheme (which outlines planning policy documents the Council intend to produce and the timescale for their preparation) should be kept up to date and publically available.

There is now no requirement for the Council to consult when reviewing and updating their SCI (Planning Practice Guidance para. 30). However, to keep communities informed and involved in the plan making process the Council will publish the SCI and any other documents forming part of their evidence base as they are completed on their website in an accessible format, rather than waiting until a formal development plan consultation.

Under the new regulations a Council is also required to:

- support the creation and modification of Neighbourhood Plans in its area (see below).
- review SCIs every five years starting from the date of adoption.
- publish reasons if, after undertaking a review, the Council concludes that an update of the SCI document is not necessary.
- publish the SCI on the website once adopted.

There is no longer a requirement for the SCI to be examined and approved by the Secretary of State because SCIs are no longer defined as 'development plan documents'.

Neighbourhood Plans:

Councils are obliged to set out how they will provide advice and assistance to neighbourhood planning groups:

- The Council must set out in the SCI how they will discharge their duty to give advice or assistance to qualifying bodies to facilitate proposals for neighbourhood development plans (NDPs) or neighbourhood development orders (NDOs), including proposals for modification.
- The Council or the Secretary of State must also notify neighbourhood planning bodies of planning applications or alterations to applications in their area once an NDP has been adopted or examined, unless the neighbourhood planning group has opted out.

Principles of Engagement

The SCI will aim to meet a number of objectives to ensure that involvement in the planning process is as easy to understand, accessible and as meaningful as possible.

Our key principles of engagement are:

- 1 'Frontloading' and early engagement**
Encouraging pre-application advice, by advising applicants to discuss future development proposals prior to submitting a planning application.
- 2 Reaching out to those whose voices are seldom heard**
Being inclusive, fair and representative in the plan-making and decision taking processes.
- 3 Empowering communities**
Local capacity building is supported through neighbourhood planning and community-related planning activities.
- 4 Avoiding jargon and communicating clearly**
Planning information should be accessible to the whole community. The Council will do its best to write all consultation documents in plain English, avoiding jargon and over-use of abbreviations
- 5 Being informative**
To make our information clear so people can make informed choices when replying to our consultations.
- 6 Improving involvement**
To make sure everyone knows why we are asking for involvement and when and how they can get involved.
- 7 Making it easy for you to get involved**
To make sure any public exercises are appropriate and accessible, and making use of existing community involvement networks and groups.
- 8 Providing feedback and being transparent**
Summarising the responses received and provide feedback on how these have been considered ensuring transparency and consistency.
- 9 Creating value for money**
Balancing cost, time constraints and available Council resources.
- 10 Being flexible and responding to change**
To make sure the ways we involve people are working, and to change them where necessary.

PART 1 – PLAN MAKING

1.1 How we produce our Local Plan documents

What is a Local Plan?

A Local plan is a document produced by a local planning authority which sets out planning policies for the future development of a local area, drawn up by the local planning authority in consultation with the community. A local plan can consist of:

- **Strategic policies which set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and quality of development and / or,**
- **non-strategic policies which can include allocating sites, the provision of infrastructure and community facilities at a local level, establishing design principles, conserving and enhancing the natural and historic environment and other development management policies.**

A Local Plan should provide the formal statutory framework for sustainable development and economic growth, whilst protecting our most valuable natural and built environmental assets. These 'Plans' can be reviewed in whole or in part and should be responsive to changing social, economic and environmental circumstances.

These Local Plan documents are seen as the key to delivering development that reflects the vision and aspirations of our local communities and for this to happen, a wide section of the community needs to be actively involved in their preparation. We must also ensure that in producing these Plans, we consult with our neighbouring Local Authority areas and communities, in addition to the County Councils, to ensure that we are inclusive and take into account those wider issues that cut across administrative boundaries.

On the publication of this SCI, the local plans in West Suffolk are:

- St Edmundsbury Core Strategy (2010)
- Bury St Edmunds Vision 2031 (2014)
- Haverhill Vision 2031 (2014)
- Rural Vision 2031 (2014)
- Forest Heath Core Strategy (2010)
- Saved policies of the 1995 Forest Heath Local Plan (1995)
- West Suffolk Joint Development Management Policies Document (2015)

Two additional plans are at an advanced stage in the plan preparation process. The *Forest Heath Single Issue Review of Core Strategy Policy CS7* and the *Site Allocations Local Plan* have been through Examination and the Inspectors' reports are expected by the end of 2018. The documents will then be taken to Council for adoption and will become part of the development plan.

A new Local Plan will then be prepared for West Suffolk in line with this SCI and national legislation, this plan will replace the existing Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury plans once adopted.

In addition the Hargrave Neighbourhood Plan (2018) forms part of the development plan for West Suffolk.

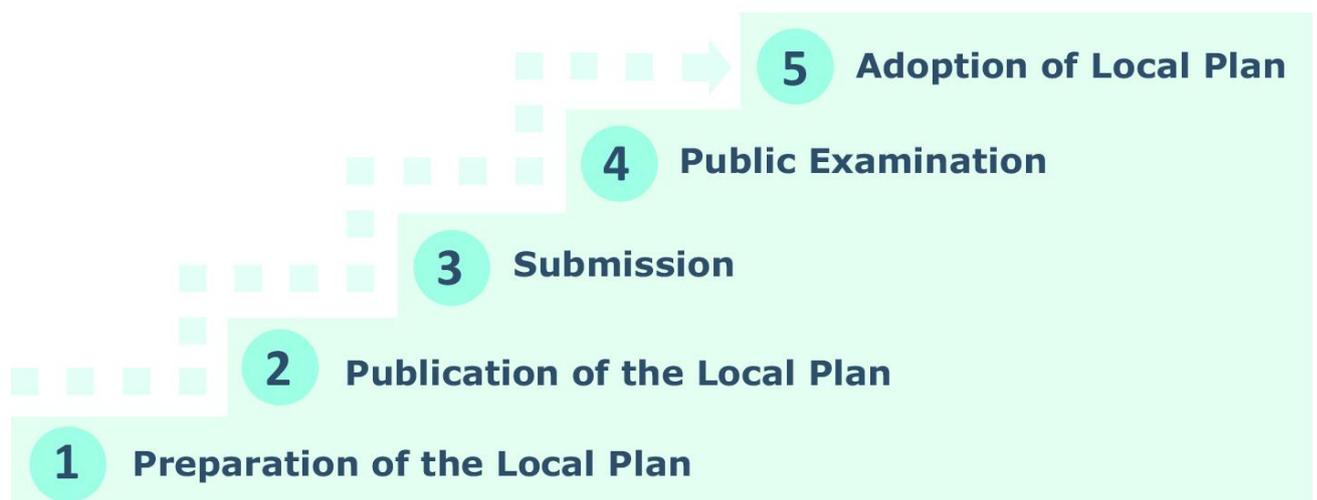
Further details of the documents being produced and the timescales for consultation and adoption are set out in the Local Development Scheme (LDS).

1.2 Procedure for producing Local Plans

What are the key stages in the preparation of a Local Plan document?

There are a number of key steps involved in the preparation of Local Plan documents as set out in the diagram below. These stages are required by Government planning legislation and regulations and are designed to ensure that the process is as transparent as possible and that communities have sufficient input so that the Plans that are ultimately adopted are robust and justified:

Steps in preparation of a Local Plan



Following the process above there is a set protocol that all Authorities must follow when they wish to bring a Local Plan document through to adoption.

Consultation on Development Plan Documents (DPDs)

1 Preparation of the Local Plan (Regulation 18)

Summary

- The information needed for the plan is prepared and issues and options are identified.
- The Council notify and consult on scope of plan for a period of **6 weeks**.

What the Council is required to do by legislation

- Invite statutory and general consultees, residents and businesses in the West Suffolk area to comment on **what the Local Plan should include**.
- The Council will notify people on our consultation database through emails and letters.

What the Council will also do at this stage

- Minimum of **one** consultation
- Hold **workshops/exhibitions** to help decide issues to be included in the plan
- Add **consultation information** on **Council website** and **social media sites**

- The information gathered in stage 1 helps to **shape detailed policy** and options for **allocating development sites**.
- Depending on the level of complexity, the draft Local Plan stage may involve more than one period of consultation.

Drafting of the Local Plan

- **Publish draft documents and supporting documents for consultation** for a minimum of **six weeks**, including Sustainability Appraisal and Habitat Regulation Assessment if necessary
- Consultation documents are made available on the **Council website**
- Issue **press release** to local media
- Add information on the Council's **social media sites**
- Arrange **exhibitions and community roadshow events** in defined locations (focussed exhibitions will also take place where there is a direct and significant impact on that settlement)
- Make hard copies available for inspection at the **Council offices**

2 Publication of the Local Plan (Regulation 19)

Summary

- The submission version of the Local Plan is finalised and published for a last stage of consultation (minimum of **six weeks**)
- Comments at this stage will only be sought on soundness and legal compliance.
- At this stage we will also consult on the Sustainability Appraisal Report and Habitat Regulation Assessment which assesses the potential impact the Local Plan will have on the economy, the environment and on society.

What the Council is required to do by legislation

- **Publish the Local Plan** and supporting documents for a minimum of **six weeks**
- Make **hard copies available for inspection** at Council offices
- Publish electronic copies of all the documents on the **Council website**
- **Send letters/emails** to statutory and general consultation bodies and individuals and organisations on the consultation database

What the Council will also do at this stage

- **Arrange exhibitions** in defined locations (focussed exhibitions and Parish Council meetings will also take place where requested and practicable)
- Add information on the Council's **social media sites**
- Issue **press release** to local media

3 Submission (Regulation 22)

Summary

- The Local Plan, and all supporting documents and the comments received from public consultation, are submitted to the Secretary of State, who appoints an independent Planning Inspector.
- Supporting documents include a Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment and a consultation statement, (summarising the representations made to the previous rounds of consultation).

What the Council is required to do by legislation

- Make hard copies available for inspection at **Council offices**
- Publish electronic copies of all the documents on the **Council website**
- Notify people who have specifically requested to be **notified of submission** by email or letter

What the Council will also do at this stage

- Add information on the Council's **social media sites**
- Issue **press release** to local media

4 Public Examination (Regulation 24)

Summary

- The Local Plan and the comments received are examined by the Planning Inspector.

- At least 6 weeks before the start of the examination in public, anyone who made a representation and indicated that they wish to **attend and speak at the public hearings** will be informed of the date, time, venue and format of the hearings.

- The Council will provide details of the examination in public and public hearings by **letter, email, website and public notice**.

- Following the examination, the Inspector's recommendations and their reasons for making those recommendations will be available for inspection at **Council offices** and on our **website**.

- The Council will also **advise people who specifically asked to be notified** that the report is available for inspection.

5 Adoption of Local Plan (Regulation 26)

Summary

- The Local Plan is adopted by Full Council following the Council's consideration of the recommendations.

What the Council is required to do by legislation

- Make the **Inspector's report** available for inspection on the **Council's website** and at **Council offices**
- **Inform consultees** who previously made representations about the availability of Inspector's Report
- Following adoption of the Local Plan, we will **publish the Local Plan**; make electronic copies available on the **Council website** and hard copies available at **Council offices**
- Send **adoption statement** to the Secretary of State, consultation bodies and those who made representations at previous stages or those who have asked to be notified of the adoption

- Make the Sustainability Appraisal and other **supporting documents** available for inspection for six weeks after adoption

What the Council will also do at this stage

- Add adoption information on Council's **social media sites**
- Make hard copies available for inspection at **local libraries**

Consultation on the Strategic Environmental Assessment, (SEA), and Sustainability Appraisal, (SA)

What is a Sustainability Appraisal (SA)/Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)?

Sustainability Appraisals provide an assessment of the social, environmental and economic impacts of each Local Plan document and relevant supplementary planning document. The key aim is to identify and enhance any positive effects whilst minimising any adverse impacts of planning policies.

Our Local Plan documents will be subject to a Sustainability Appraisal, (SA), carried out jointly with a Strategic Environmental Assessment, (SEA). These processes will assess the environmental, social and economic implications of the Local Plan document so that their policies accord with the principles of *sustainable development* and cause least 'harm' to the environment.

Sustainability Appraisal is an iterative process and a SA/SEA report will be published at each stage of a Local Plan document's preparation. This allows any interested party the opportunity to comment on the potential environmental, social and/or economic effects of a particular proposal or policy as it emerges.

Due to their technical nature, these documents will be shared with specific social, economic and environmental consultees for their input but will also be made available to all with an interest in or likely to be affected by the proposal(s) being assessed. As a minimum we will meet the consultation requirements set out in the relevant regulations. Copies will be available on the West Suffolk website or on request.

1.3 Supporting the Neighbourhood Planning process

We are committed to encouraging local people to engage in the planning and development of their own areas. To enable this we will provide guidance and technical assistance where and when our communities wish to produce Neighbourhood Plans and Orders.

We will aim to tailor our support to take account of local circumstances, such as the complexity of the Neighbourhood Plan or Order being prepared, the skills and resources of the neighbourhood planning group and being mindful to make the most efficient use of available resources.

It must be remembered that the Neighbourhood Planning is led and owned by local community groups themselves, not the Council, and that the process will need to have regard to the relevant legislation and government guidance as well as the principles of consultation and engagement identified within this Statement.

How the Council will help with each stage of Neighbourhood Plan preparation is set out below.

In the initial stages and area designation we will:

- Meet local communities who contact us expressing an interest in neighbourhood planning, in order to provide initial advice and information and discuss options. Wherever possible, this should take place in advance of a Neighbourhood Area application being submitted.
- Check and confirm receipt of any neighbourhood area application we receive and advise the applying qualifying body of any requirements omitted.
- Map neighbourhood area boundaries required for the designation of the neighbourhood area or business area.
- Consider, in accordance with the Regulations, the boundary of the proposed neighbourhood area. Where the boundary is not considered 'coherent, consistent and appropriate in planning terms we will work with the town/parish council to come to a suitable resolution.
- Carry out statutory consultation on the proposed neighbourhood area in accordance with the Regulations. Consultation is not necessary for applications submitted by town/parish councils who are designating the whole of their area as a neighbourhood area.
- Publish details of all neighbourhood plan areas or business areas on our website and through other appropriate means as soon as practicable following formal designation.

To support the preparation of Neighbourhood Development Plans we will:

- Provide advice on which issues are considered to be relevant planning matters, and are suitable for inclusion in neighbourhood plans.

- Provide information on relevant European and national legislation and policies, and adopted and emerging Local Plan policies with which any neighbourhood plan will need to be in general conformity, including the identification of which adopted local policies are considered to be strategic.
- Share existing information and evidence base work held by the local planning authority as appropriate (subject to any data protection or confidentiality issues) and provide advice on any areas where new evidence may be required or beneficial to support the preparation of the Plan.
- Help communities communicate with local partners and/or organisations where required, including in the preliminary stages of neighbourhood plan making.
- Provide constructive comments on the emerging plan and other supporting documents prior to formal submission.
- Carry out screening / scoping to identify and provide an opinion and advice on the need for a Strategic Environmental Assessment, Sustainability Appraisal or Habitats Regulations Assessment.
- Notify parish/town councils or neighbourhood forums of planning applications in their neighbourhood areas.

We are unable to:

- Undertake consultation exercises, distribute consultation questionnaires, collect, collate or analyse responses on behalf of communities for consultation arising from requirements placed on qualifying bodies in the Regulations.
- Provide project management services for the production of the neighbourhood plan.
- Draft the neighbourhood plan or any part or policy therein, although we can identify examples in which similar plans or policies have been prepared and which may be helpful points of reference and can provide advice on wording.
- Undertake the Strategic Environmental Assessment, Sustainability Appraisal, Habitats Regulations Assessment or Appropriate Assessment. Even if required, consultants will be expected to undertake these.

For more information on the Localism Act and/or Neighbourhood Planning see: https://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/planning/Planning_Policies/neighbourhood-planning/ or contact the local plans team on neighbourhood.planning@westsuffolk.gov.uk

1.4 How we produce our Supplementary Planning Documents

What is a supplementary planning document (SPD)?

SPDs are documents which are prepared to provide further detailed supporting guidance to existing planning policies. They do not carry the same weight as a Local Plan document but they are still a 'material consideration' in determining planning applications, (i.e. their content is taken into account in the decision making process).

Supplementary Planning Documents or SPDs add further detail to the policies contained within a 'parent' Local Plan document. They can be used to provide further guidance for development on specific sites, or on particular issues, such as design or affordable housing. SPDs are capable of being a material consideration in planning decisions but are not part of the formal Development Plan.

What are the key stages in the preparation of a supplementary planning document (SPD)?

Supplementary planning documents require fewer rounds of consultation than a Local Plan document and are not subject to an independent examination. The key stages in the preparation of an SPD are set out below:

Consultation on Supplementary Plan Documents (SPDs)

1 Public Participation Stage (Regulation 12)

Summary

- Before we adopt an SPD, a draft version, will be the subject of a minimum **four week** period of public consultation.
- If there are any major changes to the SPD there may be a need to re-consult on the changes or on a revised draft.

What the Council is required to do by legislation

- **Publish the Draft SPD** for consultation for a minimum of four weeks
- Electronic copies of the plan and supporting documents to be made available on the **Council website**
- Make hard copies available for inspection at **Council offices**

What the Council will also do at this stage

- Extend the statutory consultation period to a minimum of **6 weeks**
- **Letters/emails** sent to consultation bodies and individuals and organisations on the consultation database
- Issue a **press release** to the local media
- Consultation information added to Council’s **social media** sites

2 Adoption of SPD (Regulation 14)

Summary

- The Council will consider the representations received through the consultations and make any amendments necessary before adopting the SPD.

What the Council is required to do by legislation

- Publish SPD – electronic copies and any supporting documents to be made available on the Council website and hard copies available at **Council offices**
- Send an **adoption statement** to those who have made representations during the previous consultations and those who have asked to be notified of the adoption of the SPD

What the Council will also do at this stage

- Add adoption information on the Councils **social media** sites

Concept Statements, Masterplans and Development Briefs

What are Concept Statements, Masterplans and Development Briefs?

- **Concept Statement** – a simple, clear expression of the kind of place that a new development should create. It sets out how the policies and objectives of a Local Plan will apply to a specific site in order to deliver the best possible economic, social and environmental benefits. They are prepared by the Local Planning Authority and are subject to consultation before approval.
- **Masterplan** – a detailed scheme for the development of a site, prepared by a developer but agreed by the Local Planning Authority and subject to consultation before they are approved. A Masterplan will be required where a concept statement has been prepared and on any other sites identified by the authority as requiring a masterplan approach, due to the size, location or mix of uses on a site.
- **Development Brief** – a detailed framework for the development of a site where a full master-planning approach is not required. They are normally prepared by the developer and are subject to consultation before approval by the Local Planning Authority.

From time to time there will be a need to prepare planning guidance that will provide a detailed framework for the development of a specific site. This will commonly take the form of a 'concept statement', 'masterplan' or 'development brief' and will be prepared either by the local planning authority, the landowner or developer. In preparing such frameworks there will be a need for consultation and engagement which should involve the principles set out in the pre-application section below, (section 2.1 of this Statement). These documents will be considered for adoption by the Council and at that time a report of consultation and the changes to the draft document made as a result of the consultation, will also be published.

Other policy documents will be prepared from time to time, such as conservation area appraisals and non-statutory land-use strategies. Consultation on draft documents will take place in accordance with the framework detailed within this SCI and will only be considered for adoption by the Council if a report of consultation and report of any changes resulting from the consultation are published with the final draft.

Article 4 Directions

An Article 4 Direction removes 'permitted' development (pd) rights in specific areas. This means that a planning application may need to be submitted for work which normally does not require one. Article 4 directions are made when the character, appearance or amenity of an area of acknowledged importance could be threatened by permitted development and are most common in conservation areas.

If the Council proposes to introduce an Article 4 Direction it must satisfy itself that development that would normally benefit from permitted development rights should not be carried out unless permission is granted for it on an application. We must also identify clearly the potential harm that the direction is intended to address and provide an evidenced justification for the withdrawal of permitted development rights.

Designation is a two stage process:

Article 4 Directions	Community Involvement
<p>Stage 1: Propose the Introduction of the Article Four Direction</p>	<p>Public consultation to include the following statutory measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • published a notice in a local newspaper, • Post a notice at no fewer than two locations within the area to which the direction relates; • send a copy of the notice on every owner and occupier within the area to which the direction relates unless it is impracticable to do so; • notify the Secretary of State. <p>• in addition, the notice, order and evidence base will be available on the Council's website;</p>
<p>Stage 2: Confirm the Introduction of the Article Four Direction</p>	<p>Fully consider consultation responses and report them to committee before deciding whether or not to confirm the order.</p> <p>If the decision is made to designate the Article 4 Direction the actions in the 5 bullet points above are repeated giving notice that the order has been confirmed.</p>

Please visit the Buildings conservation and Article 4 directions webpage on the West Suffolk website <https://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/planning/Conservation/index.cfm> or contact us if you would like more information on Article 4 Directions.

1.5 How we plan strategically across local boundaries

Local planning authorities and county councils have a duty to cooperate with each other, and with other prescribed bodies, on strategic matters that cross their administrative boundaries. In particular, joint working should help to determine where additional infrastructure is necessary, and whether development needs that cannot be met wholly within a particular plan area can be met elsewhere.

We will work with our neighbouring strategic policy-making authorities to identify the relevant strategic matters which we need to address in our plans. We will also engage with the local community and other relevant bodies including Local Enterprise Partnerships, Local Nature Partnerships, infrastructure providers, elected Mayors and combined authorities if required.

There are a number of existing forums where this collaboration takes place. Meetings will continue with adjoining authorities, parishes, the Local Enterprise Partnerships, (LEPs), local nature and heritage groups and infrastructure providers.

In order to demonstrate effective and on-going joint working we will, as appropriate, prepare and maintain one or more statements of common ground documenting what cross-boundary matters are being addressed, progress in cooperating to deal with them and where effective co-operation is and is not happening in the plan-making process. These will be produced using the approach set out in national planning guidance, and be made publicly available throughout the plan-making process to provide transparency and as evidence that we have complied with the duty to cooperate.

When will the statement of common ground be prepared, published and updated?

A Statement / Statements will be prepared and maintained on an on-going basis throughout the plan making process. As a minimum, a statement will be published when the area it covers and the governance arrangements for the cooperation process have been defined, and substantive matters to be addressed are determined. A statement / statements of common ground will be available on the West Suffolk website by the time the relevant draft plan is published.

Once published, we will endeavour to ensure that it reflects the most up to date position in terms of joint working across the area and will update as soon as practically possible when either agreements are reached, or a decision is taken to update strategic policies in the area covered by the statement.

1.6 Our methods for community engagement

In order for consultation and community engagement to be effective it should be approached in a systematic manner. We aim to reduce inequality by ensuring that the harder-to-reach sections of the community are consulted and their needs reflected in the planning and delivery of our services.

Some of the ways in which we will seek to engage with you are identified in table 1 below.

Specifically, the Councils will aim to engage with:

- a) all statutory consultees – those bodies which the government specifically asks us to keep informed with progress that we make with our Local Plan documents and SPDs which include the Environment Agency, Historic England, Natural England and the Highways Agency;
- b) our Parish and Town Councils and neighbouring Parish and Town Councils where appropriate;
- c) Suffolk County Council and our neighbouring District and County Councils where appropriate;
- d) local bodies and organisations, e.g. business forums and community groups; and,
- e) individuals and organisations who have expressed an interest in or a willingness to be involved in the plan-making process, such as interested members of the public, landowners and developers.

We maintain a 'Local Plan contact list' with details for all of the individuals and organisations that have previously been involved in the plan making process. This contact list also contains the details of organisations that act in the interests of a number of harder-to-reach groups who face additional barriers and constraints and require specific approaches tailored to the needs of each group.

If you wish to be added to the local plan contact list and informed of any forthcoming local plan consultations please telephone planning policy on 01284 763233 or send your details and request by email to planning.policy@westsuffolk.gov.uk

Table 1: How we will engage with our communities

At various stages in the production of our Local Plan documents we may utilise some or all of the following methods of community engagement. We will meet any statutory requirements as a minimum and attempt to tailor the method(s) of communication to the requirements of specific groups or communities if it is considered that this will aid their understanding of issues relevant to them.

Letters and emails	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emails are our preferred means of communication as they are better for environmental and cost reasons rather than sending a letter in the post.
Newspaper articles, press releases and adverts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good method of summarising topics and issues in a user friendly manner. • Reaches a potentially large audience. • Opportunity to place articles in relevant newspapers circulating in the local area should their publication be timely. • Press releases also made available on the Council websites.
Exhibitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A more visual rather than a written means of putting across ideas and concepts.
Drop-in information sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities for people to have discussions with planning staff on the content of a draft Local Plan document.
Website/Social Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Virtual notice board for the community to engage in their own time and at their own pace. • Online interaction, (including an online representation facility for the statutory consultation stages). • Use of other forms of social media to encourage interactions/debate among groups of people and share/exchange information and ideas within virtual communities and networks. • Availability of public access computer terminals at main Council offices on which Local Plan documentation and planning applications can be viewed. • Requirement to use website under current planning regulations.
Leaflets and Newsletters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good means of cascading information to a large number of people. • Distribution can be targeted at specific groups.
Dissemination of information via Councillors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Means of cascading information to both the community at large and to groups on which they sit. • Powerful advocates for local communities and their community leadership role provides them with a major input into the consultation process.
Parish/Town Council Workshops and Briefings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Useful means of engaging with Parish/Town councils in the development of Local Plan documents and in establishing local opinion on various issues and options.
Consultation with specific groups and stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing information via stakeholder groups can be an effective way of disseminating information to a wide range of people.
Focus Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We can facilitate these to discover perceptions, opinions and attitudes towards development proposals and other planning matters. • Group settings can enable participants to talk freely with other group members/residents and share concerns.
Line of sight publicity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Posters and displays located in prominent positions within Council offices, around town centres and in other locations/facilities.
Early warning of consultation periods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council's Local Development Scheme will provide information on the timetable for producing Local Planning Documents. Where possible local groups will be advised of forthcoming consultation exercises through e-mail alerts.
Focussed meetings with recognised lobby groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These will be considered when requested and where there are clear and significant implications for the settlement represented by the lobby group as a result of emerging policy documents at publication stage.

PART 2 – PLANNING APPLICATIONS

As a planning authority the Council are responsible for deciding whether development should go ahead. Opportunities exist for the community and stakeholders to get involved in this process at the pre-application, application, and if necessary appeal stages.

Planning legislation sets out the minimum requirements for publicising and consulting the community and stakeholders on planning applications. This section sets out how the Council meets these requirements through the development management process, and also the role of the developer in engaging with the local community.

2.1 The Pre-application stage

We encourage applicants for all types of development to engage in pre-application discussions with planning officers, especially in regards to development that involves a degree of sensitivity. During a pre-application discussion the planning officer will, if possible, be able to:

- Advise whether or not the principle of development would be acceptable,
- Highlight matters that should be addressed before the submission of the planning application; and
- Verify the format, type and level of information required for submission with the planning application.

It is hoped that undertaking pre-applications discussions will result in better applications where the appropriate information is submitted and therefore the rest of the planning application process can be progressed without delay.

Applicants with major or sensitive proposals are also encouraged to undertake pre-application consultations with other interested/relevant bodies such as the County Highways Department, Natural England and/or the Environment Agency.

Developers for major or sensitive proposals, are also encouraged to engage with local communities, prior to the application being submitted. The form and extent of such engagement(s) will vary depending on the particular proposal but should include one or more of the methods of consultation outlined in table 1 above.

Applicants for smaller proposals are encouraged to consult with their neighbours and adjoining landowners so that any concerns can be addressed before the planning application is submitted.

We provide a range of pre-application advice options, including planning performance agreements (PPAs) for more complex schemes. Charges are payable for most options with a few exceptions. Further information can be found on the West Suffolk website on the following link:

https://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/planning/planning_applications/preapplicationadvice.cfm

Screening and Scoping Opinions (Environmental Impact)

An Environmental impact assessment (EIA) is a procedure required for certain projects to ensure that decisions are made in full knowledge of any likely significant effects on the environment. Screening is the process of deciding which projects require an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). A scoping opinion considers what information should be included in an EIA if required.

Where a screening opinion is requested under the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Regulations, we will place the request, Opinion / Direction on the public register and website. Once an Opinion is adopted or a direction from the Secretary of State is received we will notify local ward member(s) and the relevant Town or Parish Council(s) accordingly.

We will consult the statutory consultation bodies as defined in the Environment Impact Assessment Regulations on the content of any scoping opinion.

2.2 Publicising our planning applications

The Development Management Procedural Orders and Planning, Listed Building and Conservation Area Regulations set out the statutory requirements for publishing the applications that we receive. These are set-out below:

What we will do, as a minimum, when publicising applications and notifications:

<i>Application Type</i>	<i>West Suffolk Website</i>	<i>Neighbour Notification</i>	<i>Site Notice (21 days)</i>	<i>Notice in Local Newspaper</i>
Major applications	√		√	√
Applications subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment	√		√	√
Proposals which depart from the Development Plan	√		√	√
Applications that affect a right of way	√		√	√
Applications for Listed Building Consent	√		√	√*
Applications within a Conservation Area	√		√	√
Tree preservation order applications	√			
Trees in Conservation Area applications	√	√		
Applications not included in the above categories	√	√	√	
Permitted Development notifications	As required by the General Permitted Development Order (GPDO)			

Note: See Glossary for definition and more information on Application Types.

* Minor internal works to listed buildings may not require a notice in the press

2.3 How we will engage with our communities

As appropriate we will:

<i>Consultation Method</i>	<i>Description</i>
West Suffolk Website	We will publish the following information on the West Suffolk website (www.westsuffolk.gov.uk): <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The address or location of the proposed works,• the nature of the proposed works,• the date by which any representations about the application must be made, (which will be after the 21 day consultation period),• where and when the application may be inspected, and,• how representations may be made about the application.
Neighbour Notification	Occupiers of buildings opposite and adjacent to the application site will be sent a letter notifying them of the application.
Site Notice	The site notice includes the date on which the notice was displayed and gives interested parties 21 days from the date of the notice being displayed within which to submit their comments. The notice also specifies the application site address, a description of the proposal, the planning application number and details of where the application can be inspected. It also advises that any representations should be made in writing.
Notice in a Local Newspaper	We will place an advert in one or more of the local newspapers which circulate in the locality. Members of the public are advised that they have 21 days from the date of the advert to submit their comments.

Viewing Planning Applications

All planning applications are available to view on the West Suffolk website by visiting www.westsuffolk.gov.uk and clicking on the 'Planning and building regulation' tab.

All planning applications are also available electronically for public inspection at the Council Offices whose addresses can be found in Appendix C of this Document.

2.4 How you can give us feedback and comment on a planning application

Comments are welcomed on any planning application that either support, object, or simply comment on particular proposals. Any comments received in writing will be used to help inform the decision making process and will be published on the West Suffolk website. We would prefer that these comments are made online. It is also possible to make a comment by contacting the appropriate member of the planning staff via email or the post. Any anonymous comments made on an application will not be accepted. If we receive a representation saying simply 'No objection' it will be treated simply as a neutral comment.

It is particularly important that you send your written comments to the appropriate planning officer as the responses received through this process may well help decide how the application is ultimately determined, either by delegated powers or by the Development Control Committee. However, for comments to be taken into account they must be a material planning consideration. If it is decided that a planning application will have to go to the Development Control Committee for a decision to be made, there will be the opportunity for an objector and the applicant to present verbal comments to the Committee.

Further advice on viewing and commenting on applications can be found at:

<https://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/planning/vieworcommentonplanningapplications.cfm>

A privacy statement explaining how we use any personal information we collect about you when contacting the planning service can be found at:

<https://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/privacy/privacy-notice-for-development-management.cfm>

Part 3. Monitoring and reviewing the Statement of Community Involvement

This Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) will be monitored regularly to ensure methods are kept up to date and are relevant to the local community. Changes to the document will be considered in the following circumstances:

- where changes to planning legislation or government guidance affect consultation procedures and requirements;
- where in the light of experience and feedback from community involvement exercises, changes are necessary to improve arrangements;
- where the Council makes new arrangements for community engagement, which are not reflected in the existing SCI;
- the need to reflect examples of best practice emerging from elsewhere in the country.

There is a statutory minimum requirement for this document to be reviewed every five years, however earlier review may be appropriate taking into account the circumstances listed above. We will also regularly review the procedures for involving the community, as outlined within this statement, to ensure they meet our principles of engagement and achieve a representative level of public involvement across all sections of the community.

This document is particularly important for the plan preparation process. At the examination stage, the Planning Inspector checks whether the submitted development plan has been positively prepared and is compliant with the requirements of the SCI. A statement of compliance with the SCI will be prepared as part of the self-assessment process which is submitted to the Secretary of State.

Any necessary reviews of the SCI will be reported through the Council's Annual Monitoring Report.

Part 4. Obtaining alternative planning advice

Planning staff at both Authorities are committed to providing independent and professional planning advice. However, an external body called 'Planning Aid' exists which is a voluntary service linked to the Royal Town Planning Institute, (RTPI), offering free, independent and professional advice on town planning matters to community groups. Planning Aid enables local communities, particularly those with limited resources, to participate effectively in planning matters. Among other activities, Planning Aid:

- provide information and training on the planning system,
- advise and assist groups in playing their part in the development of plans and policies at the national and local level,
- help communities develop their own strategies for their own area, including advice on producing Neighbourhood Plans and Orders,
- organise educational projects for all age groups.

Contact details for Planning Aid are provided below:

Planning Aid England

RTPI

41 Botolph Lane

London

EC3R 8DL

Tel: 020 7929 8338

e-mail: advice@planningaid.rtpi.org.uk

Appendix A: Acronyms

CS	Core Strategy
CAT	Conservation Area Tree
DM	Development Management
DMPO	Development Management Procedure Order
DPD	Development Plan Document
EC	European Commission
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EiP	Examination in Public
FHDC	Forest Heath District Council
GDPO	General Development Procedure Order
GPDO	General Permitted Development Order
JDMPD	Joint Development Management Policy Document
LPWG	Local Plan Working Group
LPA	Local Planning Authority
LDS	Local Development Scheme
NDO	Neighbourhood Development Order
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
PPG	Planning Practice Guidance
RTPI	Royal Town Planning Institute
SA	Sustainability Appraisal
SALP	Sites Allocation Local Plan document
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SEBC	St Edmundsbury Borough Council
SIR	Single Issue Review of Core Strategy Policy CS7
SoS	Secretary of State
SPD	Supplementary Planning Document
TPO	Tree Preservation Order
TCA	Tree in a Conservation Area

Appendix B: Glossary

Applications for Listed Building Consent – There is a requirement for separate permission called listed building consent for applications which affect a listed building. Listed building consent is required for all works of demolition, alteration or extension to a listed building that affect its character as a building of special architectural or historic interest.

Application subject to an EIA – A planning application that is subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) or accompanied by an environmental statement

Applications that are a departure from the local plan – A planning application that does not accord with the provisions of the Development Plan in force in the area in which the land to which the application relates is situated.

Application within or affecting a conservation area – A planning application that is situated within or may have an effect on a designated conservation area.

Core Strategy – Outlines the key principles regarding the development and use of land in a local authority's area.

Conservation Area – An area of special architectural or historical interest that has been designated by the Council. The character or appearance of a conservation area should be preserved or enhanced.

Development Management Policies Document – This document contains policies which will be applied to ensure that all development meets the overall vision and strategic policies as set out within the overarching Core Strategy. When we make decisions about planning applications, we will take these policies into account.

Development Plan - This includes adopted Local Plans, and neighbourhood plans and is defined in section 38 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

Development Plan Contact List – Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury administer a shared contact list with details of all statutory consultees and all other groups and individuals with an interest in the development plan making process.

Local Development Scheme (LDS) – This sets out a programme for the preparation of Local Plan documents. It is a project management tool that identifies which documents are to be prepared, the various stages required in their production together with a detailed timetable.

Localism Act – The Localism Act 2011 is an Act of Parliament that changed the powers of local government in England. The aim of the act is to facilitate the devolution of decision-making powers from central government control to individuals and communities.

Local Plan – The plan for the future development of the local area, drawn up by the Local Planning Authority, (LPA), in consultation with the community. In law this is described as the Development Plan documents adopted under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. Current Core Strategies or other planning policies,

which under the regulations would be considered to be Development Plan documents, form part of the Local Plan. The term can include old policies which have been saved under the 2004 Act.

Local Planning Authority (LPA) - The public authority whose duty it is to carry out specific planning functions for a particular area.

Material Consideration - A factor which will be taken into account when reaching a decision on a planning application or appeal. Under Section 38 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, decisions on planning applications 'must be made in accordance with the [development] plan unless other material considerations indicate otherwise'.

Major application: A planning application that involves one or more of the following;

- a) The winning and working of minerals or the use of land for mineral-working deposits;
- b) Waste development;
- c) The development involves the provision of dwellings where –
 - i. The provision of 10 or more dwellings;
 - ii. The development area is 0.5 hectares or more and it is not known whether the development falls within criterion c) i.;
- d) The development will create 1000 square metres or more of floor space;
- e) The site area of the development is 1 hectare or more.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) - Designed to consolidate all national policy statements, circulars and guidance documents into a single, simpler National Planning Policy Framework. The Framework is intended to provide clear policies for making robust local and neighbourhood plans and development management decisions.

Neighbourhood Development Orders (NDO) - An Order made by a Local Planning Authority, (under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990), through which Parish Councils and neighbourhood forums can grant planning permission for a specific development proposal or classes of development.

Neighbourhood Plans – A plan prepared by a Parish Council or Neighbourhood Forum for a particular neighbourhood area, (made under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004).

Non-Major application – A planning application for minor development or that requires a householder application or other planning application.

Permitted development notification – a notification of development that accords with the most up to date General Permitted Development Procedure Order.

Planning Practice Guidance – The Government's web based resource which brings together its guidance on planning issues in one place adding detail to the policies in the NPPF.

Pre-application stage – Discussions may take place and in many cases are expected, between the Local Planning Authority and potential applicants before a planning application is submitted. Pre-application discussions can help to clarify the

nature of the proposal and can point to the need for additional material to accompany a planning application when it is finally made.

Site Specific Allocation Policies – Policies that relate to the allocation of land for development.

Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) – Documents which add further detail to the policies in the Local Plan. They can be used to provide further guidance for development on specific sites, or on particular issues, such as design. Supplementary planning documents are capable of being a material consideration in planning decisions but are not part of the formal Development Plan, (see above).

Sustainability Appraisal (SA) – This is a tool for appraising policies to ensure that they reflect sustainable development objectives. An appraisal is required by legislation for all Local Plans and many SPDs.

Strategic Environment Assessment (SEA) – the European Strategic Environment Assessment Directive, (2001/42/EC), requires an assessment of certain plans and programmes including those related to planning and land-use.

TPO application – A Tree Preservation Order, (TPO), is an Order made to preserve a tree(s) that is considered to bring amenity value to the surrounding area by the local authority. The order makes it an offence to cut down, uproot, prune, lop or damage the tree in question without first obtaining the Council's consent. A TPO can apply to a single tree, a group of trees, and area or a woodland.

TCA application – Trees in Conservation Areas which are already protected by a TPO are subject to the TPO protection outlined above. Trees within a conservation area, but are not subject to a TPO have special protection. Anyone proposing to cut down or carry out work on any trees within a conservation area, is required to give the Council six weeks prior notice. This is to give the Council an opportunity to consider whether a TPO should be made in respect of the tree.

Appendix C: FHDC/SEBC 'Principal Offices'

The places below are referred to within this SCI as our 'Principal Offices' and are the locations in which we will make our Local Plan and Supplementary Planning Documents available for public inspection.

West Suffolk House
Western Way
Bury St Edmunds
IP33 3YU
01284 763233

District Council Offices,
College Heath Road,
Mildenhall,
IP28 7EY

Customer Information,
The Brandon Centre,
Bury Road,
Brandon,
IP27 0BQ

Haverhill House,
Lower Downs Slade,
Haverhill,
Suffolk
CB9 9EE

Area Office,
63 The Guineas,
Newmarket,
Suffolk,
CB8 8HT