



**North
Herts**
Council

**Statement of Community Involvement
Draft – March 2023**

Draft Statement of Community Involvement – March 2023

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) sets out how North Herts Council will involve the community in the planning process.
- 1.2 The SCI explains how and with whom the Council will consult when carrying out its planning duties. This document relates only to the Council's planning functions, but it is intended to compliment the Council's wider approach to community engagement.
- 1.3 All Local Planning Authorities are required to prepare an SCI to comply with national legislation, policies and guidance¹. The Council first adopted an SCI in 2006 and it has been updated periodically since then.
- 1.4 The SCI must be reviewed every five years. This review follows the adoption of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 – 2031 in November 2022. We have tried to reflect the changing priorities which we will need to address in the coming years. This includes explaining how you can be involved in the preparation of:
 - ❖ Supplementary planning document which will support the new Plan;
 - ❖ Neighbourhood plans;
 - ❖ Pre-application masterplans for the largest residential sites in North Hertfordshire;
 - ❖ Individual planning applications for development; and
 - ❖ The review of the Local Plan.
- 1.5 In addition, the SCI sets out the Council's expectations upon developers with regards to involving the community in their planning proposals which are not subject to the masterplanning process.
- 1.6 The Council has recently published a [Community Consultation Strategy](#) for 2022 – 2027. Whilst the SCI has been prepared with reference to the Consultation Strategy, it is specifically written for planning policy consultations and consultations associated with planning applications.
- 1.7 Temporary changes were introduced to the Regulations² in response to the COVID-19 pandemic concerning publicity and the physical inspection of planning documents. Given the uncertain nature of the pandemic and the potential for new variants to emerge, it is feasible that those temporary measures may be reintroduced in the future. If such circumstances arise again, any changes will be implemented locally and will replace the requirements set out in this updated SCI. This will avoid having to revise the SCI.
- 1.8 Where we are unable to meet some of the requirements set out in this document, but have made every reasonable effort to do so, we will consider that the conditions have been met.

¹ Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012(as amended); Town and Country Planning (Development Management procedure) (England) Order 2015; National Planning Policy Framework and National Planning Practice Guidance

² Town and Country Planning (Local Planning)(England)(Coronavirus) Amendment Regulations (2020)

2. Community Involvement in Strategic Planning

2.1. The Strategic Planning Team is directly responsible for preparing local planning policies and supplementary planning documents. We also work collaboratively alongside communities preparing their neighbourhood plans as well as landowners or promoters who are developing masterplans for strategic and significant sites.

2.2. We are committed to involving as many local people, groups and organisations from the North Herts community as possible in our planning consultations. We have an extensive consultation database in place which includes the following types of organisations:

- ❖ Statutory consultees³consultees; (listed in Appendix 1)
- ❖ Central government departments;
- ❖ Town, Parish and Community Councils;
- ❖ Neighbourhood Planning Steering Groups;
- ❖ Parish Meetings;
- ❖ Hertfordshire County Council;
- ❖ Hertfordshire District and Borough Councils;
- ❖ Neighbouring local authorities;
- ❖ Neighbouring Parish Councils; Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation;
- ❖ Local community groups and organisations;
- ❖ Black and minority ethnic groups;
- ❖ Religious / faith groups;
- ❖ Disabled persons organisations;
- ❖ Developers, landowners and agents;
- ❖ Businesses and business interest groups; and
- ❖ Individual members of the public.

This list is illustrative, not definitive.

2.3. When we consult on our planning documents, we will ensure that we meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, which aims to promote equality, eliminate discrimination and encourage good relations between different groups associated with age, disability, gender, race, religion and other protected characteristics. It is recognised that some parts of the community are not always adequately represented in planning consultations and in the planning process.

2.4. In North Hertfordshire, these groups are considered to be:

- ❖ People with disabilities;
- ❖ Black and ethnic minority groups;
- ❖ Working aged people;
- ❖ Young people; and
- ❖ Gypsy and traveller communities.

³ The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 defines “specific consultation bodies” and “general consultation bodies”

- 2.5. The council's Policy and Community Engagement Team has established some links with some of these "seldom heard groups" and continues to engage with these parts of the community. In preparing our planning documents we will work with the Policy and Community Engagement Team to further develop those links and try to encourage more involvement in the future.
- 2.6. Our consultation list for planning policy documents, masterplans for strategic sites and neighbourhood plans is always open to new consultees. If you would like to add your name to that list, the best way is by registering your contact details through our website: <https://north-herts.oc2.uk/register>. Registering your interest this way, allows you to decide which areas of local planning work you are interested in and amend your details when necessary.
- 2.7. You can also register your interest by contacting us, using these details:
- Strategic Planning Team
North Herts Council
PO Box 10613
Nottingham
NG6 6DW
Email : localplans@north-herts.gov.uk
Telephone : 01462 474000
- 2.8. To ensure that you receive all the information that you are interested in, we will need your name, organisation (where appropriate), either an email address or a postal address and an indication of the types of local planning issues you might be interested in. We will only contact you if you "opt-in" to receive details about particular types of local planning documents.
- 2.9. The [privacy notice](#) for the Regulatory Directorate sets out how your personal data will be used and by whom and is available on the Council's website. Where we are directly responsible for carrying out consultations, we will use our database to decide who we should contact. Where we are working with other organisations on planning matters – such as neighbourhood plans or masterplans – we may provide your details so they can contact you to find out your views; but we will only do this if you have told us this is ok.
- 2.10. We will review our local plan consultation list on a regular basis. We may contact you from time-to-time to ensure that your details are kept up to date and that you do not receive any information which you have not requested. Please do not ignore these emails and letters. If you do not respond we may have to delete your details from our database. This is because of changes in the law which say how we must protect your data and personal information.

3. Consultation Methods

- 3.1 Some of the methods we can use for community involvement are listed in the table below. The list is not definitive, but it includes those methods which we consider to be the most effective, practical and cost effective where we are directly responsible for producing planning documents. We will use a variety of these methods to engage and consult with the community as and where appropriate.
- 3.2 Where Parish Councils or developers are carrying out their own consultations on planning matters, we will encourage them to use an appropriate range of methods.

Table 1 : Methods of consultation for strategic and local planning consultations

| Methods for notifying and consultation | Comments |
|--|--|
| Website | <p>It is a statutory requirement that some of our consultation documents are available to view on the council's website (www.north-herts.gov.uk). We will use both the planning pages of the website and the Council's consultation page for our consultation documents.</p> <p>The website will also include any background information and updates on all our consultation documents, including supplementary planning documents, masterplans and the local plan.</p> <p>We have an online consultation portal which you can use to make your comments during open consultation periods.</p> |
| Letters and email | <p>For some of our consultation documents, it is a statutory requirement that all statutory consultees are notified in writing (which maybe by email) when a document is published for consultation. In some circumstances a number of general consultees may also be notified in writing, where a document may be of particular interest.</p> <p>The council will encourage greater use of email in the future as this helps us to reduce our costs and paper usage.</p> |
| Social Media | <p>The council uses Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Nextdoor and Twitter to inform the North Herts community about consultations for the local plan, supplementary planning documents, masterplans and neighbourhood plans.</p> |

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| | <p>The use of social media will increase in importance as a method of raising awareness of the issues and documents being prepared for consultation as well as the publicising the methods of responding to a consultation. For example, the Council has a YouTube channel but there is only very limited content on it at present.</p> <p>At the moment, the Council is not using these social media outlets as a mechanism for collecting consultation responses, but we do use them to promote consultations and they include links to the relevant information. We will review our use of social media in the future, as it might be particularly helpful in the early stages of consultations.</p> |
| Council Offices and Libraries | <p>We will normally put paper copies of consultation documents which cover the whole District in the Council Offices and the local libraries during the consultation period. These will be available for inspection at the libraries during their normal opening times or by appointment at the Council Offices. As well as paper copies our reception provides access to a computer linked to the NHDC website for those who cannot access or easily use the internet at home.</p> |
| Local Media | <p>We prepare press releases at the start of consultations for planning documents to raise awareness. These can be supplemented during the consultation period where particular issues are raised or to further raise awareness.</p> |
| Town, Parish and Community Councils | <p>The council will consult the Town, Parish and Community Councils within the local authority area and in adjoining local authority areas where appropriate.</p> <p>The council will also encourage the Town and Parish Councils to use their own newsletters, magazines and notice boards to further publicise consultations for the local plan, supplementary planning documents (where relevant) and neighbourhood plans.</p> |
| Advertisements | <p>The council usually publicises all major consultations for the local plan in the local newspapers which are circulated in the District. This presently includes The Comet, The Royston Crow and the Luton Herald and Post. However, advertisements in local newspapers are not used for neighbourhood planning consultations as the newspapers are not necessarily available in these communities. The following types of planning applications are advertised in local newspapers; major planning applications; departures</p> |

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| | <p>from the development plan; listed building consents and conservation area consents.</p> |
| Exhibitions | <p>In some circumstances the council may decide to hold exhibitions to help explain the content of a consultation document.</p> <p>However, exhibitions can be expensive to stage in terms of exhibition material, publicity, venue charges and staff time and we need to carefully balance the benefits of these events against the impact on relevant services.</p> |
| Focus Groups / Discussion Workshops | <p>Focus groups or discussion groups may be used by the council to explore selected issues with particular groups within the community. These groups can be expensive to run and require significant amounts of staff time, however participants can be recruited from the council's Citizens Panel database. They may provide an opportunity to explore issues in some depth and gain detailed and focussed comments.</p> <p>These types of events can also be held online and can be useful for small groups and can be more flexible for participants.</p> |
| Posters and Leaflets | <p>Posters and leaflets can be a useful and immediate way to draw attention to a local plan consultation.</p> <p>Posters can be particularly effective where there are community notice boards and large numbers of people passing them.</p> <p>There are however issues to be considered in producing leaflets as they can be relatively expensive if delivered to every household and business in the District.</p> |
| NHDC Outlook Magazine | <p>We have consistently used Outlook to inform residents and local businesses about local planning issues. However, the publication dates for the council's newsletter do not always coincide with consultation periods. We will continue to provide updates on local planning issues through Outlook when appropriate.</p> |
| Questionnaires and Surveys | <p>Questionnaires and surveys can be an effective way of gaining focussed views on a consultation document, particularly in the early stages of consultations.</p> |

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| Use of existing partnerships, forums and panels | There are a number of organisations across the District which can provide representative views from a range of organisations and agencies as well as specific community groups. We will consult with these organisations where appropriate and continue to explore further opportunities. |
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Making comments

3.3 Comments in response to a planning consultation document can be made by:

- ❖ Using the council’s online consultation software:
- ❖ Email; or
- ❖ In writing.

Full details of how to make comments are included in all our consultation documents, on our website and in the advertisements that the council places in local newspapers.

3.4 Comments are sometimes submitted to councillors and other elected representatives by email, letter or by other methods. These comments will not be considered as formal representations, unless they are copied to the Strategic Planning team within the consultation period.

3.5 We do not accept responses to consultation documents by telephone.

What will we do with your comments?

3.6 The council will ensure that when consultation is undertaken, all appropriate comments will be used to inform the content of the planning documents. Inevitably there will be some conflict between the comments and representations and it will not be possible for the council to amend the planning documents to suit everyone, but the council will consider all the comments carefully in preparing the local planning documents. The Council will not respond to all comments and representations individually.

3.7 At the end of a consultation period, the council will analyse all of the comments received and will prepare a summary of the comments. This summary will be presented to Cabinet or Full Council as a background paper to any recommendation for changes to the planning document. When the council submits a planning document to the Secretary of State it must be accompanied by a statement of consultation which sets out a summary of the representations received and the main issues raised. All of the comments and reports will be made available to view on the council’s website and at the council’s offices on request.

3.8 Any individual or organisation making comments on any local planning document, a supplementary planning document or a neighbourhood plan will be added as a consultee for that particular consultation document on our database.

3.9 Increasingly, comments and objections are posted onto social media web pages and on-line petitions. There are a wide variety of social media pages and groups which the council is not necessarily aware of, e.g. private Facebook groups and it does not have

the resources to monitor the activity on these sites. Comments and objections made in this way therefore will not be taken into account when formally considering all the representations made in response to a consultation document, unless they have been formally submitted to the council, in which case they will be recorded and considered in accordance with paragraph 6.3. Comments made on the council's own Twitter feed and Facebook page will be monitored but will not be taken as formal representations to a local planning consultation.

- 3.10 Please note that the council, in its absolute discretion, reserves the right not to consider or include comments which are inappropriate including:
- ❖ comments of a discriminatory nature (age, gender, disability, ethnicity, religious belief and sexual orientation) including racist and homophobic comments;
 - ❖ inflammatory or offensive comments (of a foul or abusive nature); or
 - ❖ any other comments of a similar nature that it deems inappropriate.
- 3.11 If a written response to a consultation is received which contains inappropriate content as listed above, this will be discarded from the consultation and, where there is a postal address, will be returned. In these circumstances the respondent will be given an opportunity to make their comments using more appropriate language so that they can be considered as part of the consultation process.
- 3.12 In some instances, the council receives hard copy petitions in response to consultation documents. For the purposes of recording representations made in this way, the subject of the petition will be noted as a representation and the person responsible for submitting the petition will be recorded and will be kept informed of the progress on the relevant consultation document. The signatories to the petition will not be recorded or added to our consultation database but the number of signatories will be recorded. The Council will treat on-line petitions in the same way.

4. Social Media

- 4.1 The Council does use Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Nextdoor and Twitter to inform residents, local groups and organisations about Council activities. The Council will continue to make use of social media platforms to promote future consultations for the strategic site masterplans, supplementary planning documents, neighbourhood plans and the review of the local plan. The use of social media will increase in importance as a method of raising awareness of the issues and documents being prepared for consultation as well as the publicising the methods of responding to a consultation.
- 4.2 At the moment, the Council is not using these social media outlets as a mechanism for collecting formal consultation responses; however, any comments made will be reviewed and may be used to review consultation methods in the future.
- 4.3 As the use of mobile technology changes and increases, the Council will need to respond to these changes and will consider how to make future planning consultation documents and accompanying documentation, including digital mapping, as easy as possible to use. Most of our planning documents and maps are presently made available as PDF files. However, these can be large and lengthy and are not always easy to navigate, particularly if readers are interested in a single topic or a specific geographical area. They are a simple electronic copy of the physical document(s) we are consulting on. This approach doesn't necessarily fit well with modern preferences such as:
- ❖ receiving bite-size information;
 - ❖ 'swipe and tap' mobile technology such as tablets and smartphones; and
 - ❖ interactive and shareable content.
- 4.4 We need to strike an appropriate balance between responding to changing trends and technologies, producing the documents we are legally required to and the resources available to the Council.

5. Community Involvement in pre-application Masterplanning

- 5.1 Our new Local Plan allocates a number of strategic and significant sites for development in North Hertfordshire over the coming years. We normally define 'strategic' sites as those which will deliver 500 or more homes and 'significant' sites as those which will deliver 100 or more homes.
- 5.2 We recognise that large-scale developments will have a significant impact on the communities they are located in so it is important that the Council, communities and stakeholders are all involved in the masterplan process so they can meaningfully shape the planning and design outcomes.
- 5.3 We have a requirement ([Policy SP9 in the Local Plan](#)) that a masterplan will be prepared for these sites by the landowners / developers in collaboration with the Council and which will be subject to consultation and engagement with key stakeholders.
- 5.4 We strongly encourage landowners / developers to produce and agree masterplans *before* they apply for planning permission. Where this is the case, good quality public consultation will be a critical element of the project.
- 5.5 We have established a Project Management and Governance framework to effectively and pro-actively shape the masterplans for the strategic sites. We have produced a range of supporting guidance to help guide developers, landowners and communities through the process. Full details are set out in the dedicated [masterplanning](#) area of our website.
- 5.6 A consultation strategy will be developed as part of the pre-application Strategic Masterplan work. In terms of stakeholder and community engagement, the Council anticipates that key stakeholders will normally be engaged through at least one focused workshop event (or equivalent) as proposals are developed. The nature and timing of that engagement will be agreed on a project by-project basis to respond to the individual project needs. The Council will assist landowners to undertake a stakeholder mapping exercise to ensure that all relevant groups are consulted. These groups might include:
- ❖ District Councillors;
 - ❖ Hertfordshire County Councillors;
 - ❖ Adjoining local authorities (where appropriate);
 - ❖ Local and adjoining Parish Councils;
 - ❖ Neighbourhood planning groups (where appropriate);
 - ❖ Natural England;
 - ❖ Environment Agency
 - ❖ Historic England
 - ❖ Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust; and
 - ❖ Local residents and community groups.

- 5.7 At draft masterplan stage, a wider public consultation event should take place. This will normally be arranged and run by the landowner / developer and supported by the Council.
- 5.8 In terms of the ways in which the community consultations will take place, these will be based on the methods of consultation set out in Table 1 above. We will work with the landowners and developers to ensure that the most appropriate methods of community consultation are used for each masterplan. The public engagement event could take the form of an exhibition or drop-in or workshops supported by a dedicated website. We will make staff available to attend such events. The landowner will be responsible for the production of materials, staffing costs and venue hire.
- 5.9 We may share the contact details of individuals or groups where they have told us they have a particular interest in the area or site in question to make sure your views can be heard.
- 5.10 A feedback report from the consultation will be required to feed into the final Strategic Masterplan. This will clearly set out how consultation helped to positively shape and influence the proposals.
- 5.11 This is our preferred approach to producing masterplans for strategic and significant development. However, we cannot insist that this process is followed. We cannot require that a planning application is submitted at any particular time. A planning application for strategic or significant development without a pre-agreed masterplan might be submitted without having engaged with the pre-application process.
- 5.12 Policy SP9 therefore also allows for its requirements to be met by agreeing a Strategic Masterplan following the submission of a planning application and securing this either prior to or as part of the grant of planning permission.
- 5.13 Where this is the case, community involvement and engagement on any masterplan will take place as part of the Development Management process. More information on this is set out in the following section.

6. Supplementary Planning Documents and Planning Briefs

- 6.1 Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) provide more detailed advice or guidance in respect of adopted local plan policies, however they cannot introduce new planning policies. SPDs are capable of being a material consideration in respect of a planning decision but they do not form part of the development plan.
- 6.2 The Council has agreed that we will prepare SPDs on Sustainability, Biodiversity and Design. We will consult on the content of these documents, but they are not subject to examination by a Planning Inspector before they are adopted by the Council.
- 6.3 The following table sets out a summary of the consultation stages and methods of consultation which the Council may use in preparing an SPD or Planning Brief. For some consultations we may organise workshops or drop-in sessions where it is appropriate.

Table 2 : Supplementary Planning Documents – Stages of preparation and consultation methods

| SPD Stage of Preparation | Consultation duration | Consultation methods |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|--|
| Research / Initial scoping | No minimum | ❖ Written consultation, focussed surveys or meetings with key stakeholders where required |
| Draft SPD consultation | 4 weeks (minimum) | ❖ Written / email consultations with statutory consultees, relevant general consultees on our database, other relevant stakeholders, individuals and organisations who have expressed a wish to be consulted or have previously made comments on the document being considered; ❖ Consultation documents available for public inspection on the Council's website; ❖ Digital consultation using the Council's on-line consultation portal; ❖ Promotion of the SPD and advice on how to engage with its development through the Council's social media platforms; and ❖ Hard copies of the consultation document available at the Council Offices and at other places considered appropriate. |
| Final Draft SPD Consultation | | |

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| Adoption | | <p>The adopted SPD, a statement of the representations received and the response to those representations and an adoption statement will be available to view on the Council's website.</p> <p>All those who made comments will be informed.</p> |
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7. Neighbourhood Planning

- 7.1 Neighbourhood plans are Community-led documents, prepared by Parish Councils or a Neighbourhood Planning Forum. The District Council is committed to supporting local communities preparing neighbourhood plans and they form an important part of how the local community can be engaged in the planning system.
- 7.2 The [Neighbourhood Planning \(General\) Regulations 2012](#) (as amended) set out the statutory requirements for the preparation of neighbourhood plans. Consultation during the early stages of neighbourhood plan preparation is undertaken by the Parish Council or the neighbourhood forum and is not covered by the requirements of this Statement of Community Involvement. However, the SCI might still contain guidance which is useful to groups preparing neighbourhood plans.
- 7.3 When a neighbourhood plan is “made” it becomes part of the statutory development plan for the District, this means that there are a number of legal requirements that the neighbourhood plan must meet. These are known as the “Basic Conditions”. A neighbourhood plan must;
- ❖ have regard to national planning policy;
 - ❖ be in general conformity with the strategic policies in the saved Local Plan;
 - ❖ contribute to the achievement of sustainable development;
 - ❖ be compatible with environmental obligations; and
 - ❖ be compatible with human rights requirements.
- 7.4 The table below sets out the key steps for neighbourhood planning and also outlines the level of support that can be expected from the us, the District Council. Further information can be found on the Council’s [website](#).

Table 3 : Neighbourhood Plans – Stages of Preparation

| Stage of Preparation | Commentary |
|--|--|
| Designation of a neighbourhood planning area | <p>In those areas of the District where there is a Parish or Town Council, the Parish or Town Council must apply for a neighbourhood planning area to be designated.</p> <p>If an application is received to designate the whole parish area, we are required to designate the whole area⁴.</p> <p>At this stage, we expect the Parish or Town Council to provide a formal request to designate the neighbourhood planning area and a map which shows the extent of the neighbourhood planning area.</p> <p>In those areas of the District where there is no Parish Council, a neighbourhood planning forum must be established in order to produce a neighbourhood plan.</p> |

⁴ [The Neighbourhood Planning \(General\) and Development Management Procedure \(Amendment\) Regulations 2016](#)

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| | <p>Where we need to consult on designating a neighbourhood planning area, we will consult statutory consultees and those people and organisations on our database who have expressed an interest in that neighbourhood planning area. We will advertise the application through its website and social media and will ask the relevant qualifying body to assist in publicising the consultation through its own local mechanisms, for example through a community newsletter or local website</p> |
| <p>Preparation of the first draft neighbourhood plan</p> | <p>During this stage of plan preparation, we have a duty to support the preparation of neighbourhood plans. This could include advice on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ possible themes and topics for your neighbourhood plan; ❖ useful evidence for your neighbourhood planning policies; ❖ the legal requirements that have to be met; ❖ ways to consult the local community; ❖ providing maps where appropriate; and ❖ providing advice on policy writing. <p>This list is not exhaustive; however assistance will be limited to the resources we have available at any given time. If you have a detailed project plan in place, it will be easier to identify when you might need assistance from the Council.</p> <p>At this stage in the neighbourhood planning process, the Strategic Planning Team will offer 30 hours of support for each neighbourhood planning group. Our GIS team can also provide some limited help with digital mapping. Beyond this allowance, further assistance can be provided but will be charged at a rate of £30 per hour to help cover the Council's costs.</p> <p>Whilst we have a duty to support neighbourhood planning, this does not extend to financial assistance. There are other sources of funding which might be available to neighbourhood planning groups. Further information is available through Locality: https://locality.org.uk/</p> |
| <p>Pre-submission consultation on the neighbourhood plan</p> | <p>Once a draft neighbourhood plan has been prepared it will need to be consulted on for six weeks. This consultation is carried out by the Parish Council or the Neighbourhood Forum.</p> |

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| | <p>Whilst consultation at this stage should be focussed in the local community, we can help Parish Councils and qualifying bodies with the contact details for statutory consultees or other relevant organisations who might have an interest in the neighbourhood plan. Parish Councils and qualifying bodies are encouraged to consult with the wider community which might include community groups, landowners, businesses and developers. Some of the consultation techniques listed in Table 1 might be helpful to use in this early consultation for a neighbourhood plan.</p> <p>The consultation responses can be used to make any changes to the neighbourhood plan as a result of comments from the public in advance of submitting the plan.</p> |
| <p>Submission of the neighbourhood plan to North Herts Council</p> | <p>Once the neighbourhood plan has been prepared and the first stages of consultation have been completed, the plan will be submitted to NHC to publicise and consult on for six weeks.</p> <p>We will ensure that all of the documents submitted are correct and will arrange for consultation to take place. In most cases, delegated authority will be sought to start the consultation but there are exceptions to this where the neighbourhood planning area includes two or more electoral wards. In these circumstances, the consultation will be referred to Cabinet as a key decision. It maybe that the consultation will be undertaken with other local planning consultations to ensure the efficient use of resources.</p> <p>We will publicise the consultation through our website, news releases and through social media. Emails and letters will be sent to statutory consultees, any organisation referred to in the consultation statement, organisations in the local area and anyone who has “opted-in” to be notified of consultations for that particular neighbourhood planning area.</p> <p>We will work in collaboration with the qualifying body or neighbourhood planning forum to encourage the use of local media sources (e.g. newsletters, social media pages) to publicise the consultation.</p> |

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| <p>Independent examination of a neighbourhood plan</p> | <p>We will source an independent examiner at the end of the consultation period, once all of the representations have been confirmed to request the details of a suitable and available examiner to undertake the examination of the plan. A decision to appoint an examiner will be made in collaboration with the Parish Council.</p> <p>We will ensure that the independent examiner receives all of the relevant documentation for the examination.</p> <p>It is normal for neighbourhood plan examinations to be conducted by written representations, however, if the examiner decides that an exploratory meeting or a hearing session is necessary, we will make the appropriate arrangements in consultation with the Qualifying Body and the examiner.</p> |
| <p>Receipt of Examiner's report</p> | <p>The examiner will prepare a report which will recommend that the neighbourhood plan proceeds to a referendum with or without further modifications and that the referendum area is to be extended beyond the designated neighbourhood planning area.</p> |
| <p>Referendum</p> | <p>We will make the necessary arrangements for a neighbourhood plan referendum where the neighbourhood plan meets the basic conditions.</p> |
| <p>Making the neighbourhood plan</p> | <p>Once there has been a successful referendum, the neighbourhood plan will become part of the statutory development plan for the District and will be used in determining planning applications.</p> |

8. The Local Plan Review

- 8.1 The Local Plan was adopted on 8 November 2022 and we have a statutory duty to keep the local plan under review. At a minimum, plans must be reviewed every five years. There is a commitment in our Local Plan to conduct a review of the whole plan by the end of 2023, which will determine whether the Plan needs to be updated either in whole or part.
- 8.2 The timetable for preparing the Local Plan is set out in the Local Development Scheme (LDS). The LDS is kept under review and is available to view on our [website](#). A new LDS will be produced once the Council has made a decision on whether and how the Local Plan needs to be updated.
- 8.3 Under the current planning system, there are a number of stages involved in the preparation of a local plan and there are opportunities for you to be involved in that preparation, particularly in the early stages. The key stages of local plan preparation are set out in the table below, along with the approaches we might use if this system remains in place.
- 8.4 However, the Government is currently considering how and whether to change the planning system in the future. New laws are currently being considered by Parliament. Updated versions of national policy are expected. The detailed regulations, which set out what we must do at different stages, may change. There may be specific expectations around the use of digital or on-line methods.
- 8.5 We will continue to monitor these changes. We will decide if we need to update this Statement of Community Involvement again to reflect the latest rules and guidance when we begin work on the next version of the Local Plan.

Table 4 : Key stages of Local Plan preparation

| Stage | Description |
|---|--|
| Research and Issues Phase | <p>During this early stage, we will gather information and evidence about the area so that we can assess and identify the issues facing the District.</p> <p>Consultation during these early stages may include detailed stakeholder consultations or wider more extensive consultations.</p> <p>The Council will also assess the requirements of government guidance, other corporate strategies and technical information in order to put a draft document together.</p> |
| Draft Plan or proposals (Regulation 18) | <p>We may publish a draft plan or document to get some feedback from both the community and stakeholders. Any draft document would be made available for public</p> |

| | |
|--|--|
| | <p>consultation for a minimum period of six weeks, allowing written representations to be made.</p> <p>In addition to inviting written comments, we may also use workshops, exhibitions or online drop-in sessions to engage with different groups of the community.</p> <p>We will use any comments and feedback in the preparation and revision of the local plan before moving onto the next stages. The comments will be made available on the website.</p> <p>At this stage the draft local plan will be subject to a Strategic Environmental Appraisal (SEA) and Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and further technical work maybe commissioned.</p> |
| <p>Publication (Regulation 19)</p> | <p>The proposed local plan will be published for a formal consultation period. We will ask you for written comments on the content of the documents subject to consultation.</p> <p>We will advertise the consultation period as widely as possible through our website and where appropriate in local newspapers. We will send emails or letters to statutory consultees, local organisations and others listed on our consultation database. The consultation documents will be available on our website, at the Council Offices and in local libraries.</p> <p>Comments and representations received at this stage in the preparation of the Local Plan will be made available on the website and will be sent to the Planning Inspectorate. Summaries of the representations may be prepared to assist the Inspectors.</p> |
| <p>Submission (Regulation 22)</p> | <p>Once the consultation has been completed, the document will be submitted to the Secretary of State (represented by the Planning Inspectorate) for independent examination. All of the supporting background evidence, the SEA/SA and a statement of public involvement in the process will also be submitted as part of the examination and will be made available on the council's website.</p> |
| <p>Examination (Regulation 24)</p> | <p>An examination will be held by an Inspector, appointed by the Planning Inspectorate. The Inspector will examine the documents submitted and will identify the matters and issues for discussion at a public hearing. A timetable and guidance notes for participants will be prepared. Hearing sessions will be arranged with six weeks' notice and if the Inspector considers it necessary, they will ask participants</p> |

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| | <p>and the Council for additional information on specific issues.</p> <p>The Council will appoint a Programme Officer who will be the single point of contact with the Planning Inspector and their details will be published on the council's website.</p> <p>Only those people who submitted representations at the publication stage (Regulation 19) are entitled to be heard at the examination, although third parties can be invited by the Inspector at their discretion.</p> <p>The Inspector will assess the "soundness" of the plan and will prepare a report for the Council. That report will set out the Inspector's recommendations to the Council. The Council must then consider the report and the recommendations.</p> |
| <p>Adoption (Regulation 26)</p> | <p>The Council will adopt the local plan as soon as practicable following consideration of the Inspector's report. The local plan will then become part of the statutory development plan for the District.</p> <p>The documents will be published on the Council's website and all of those people who made representations will be informed.</p> <p>Paper copies will be available to view at the Council Offices.</p> |

9. Community Involvement in the Development Management

- 9.1 Many people only interact with the planning system when they wish to make a planning application of their own or make comments on an application which affects them directly.
- 9.2 Development management is the process by which the council determines whether a proposal for development should be granted planning permission. Planning applications must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan (the Local Plan, an adopted neighbourhood plan where appropriate, the Minerals Local Plan and the Waste Local Plan) unless material considerations (such as the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) suggest otherwise.
- 9.3 Planning applications can be determined in one of two ways:
- ❖ determination by Councillors on the Planning Control Committee; or
 - ❖ determination by development management officers under the delegated decision making procedure.

Further information is given on our website: <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/home/planning/planning-advice-and-guidance/planning-applications-decision-making-process>.

Pre-application Consultation

- 9.4 We provide an informal general enquiry system for initial queries about planning applications. There is a planning duty officer phone service between 9am and 12 noon each weekday.
- 9.5 Anyone considering making an application for planning permission can also approach the council for informal views prior to submitting a formal application, using our pre-application advice service. Any advice given at this stage is not binding, but it can help to save the applicant's time and money in pursuing schemes which may need radical alteration to be acceptable. There are no statutory requirements for pre-application discussions. The council does make a charge for pre-application advice for certain types of development proposal including:
- ❖ Significant or major proposals – Large scale, complex developments, including masterplans;
 - ❖ Category “A” Proposals – Large scale, complex development – including schemes of between 100 – 499 dwellings;
 - ❖ Category “B” – including schemes of between 25 and 99 residential units, 2000sq m or more of commercial floorspace, mixed use development on a site of more than 1 hectare (ha) or development requiring an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA);
 - ❖ Category “C” Proposals – Other major development – including schemes of between 10 and 24 residential units, provision of 1000sq m – 1999sq m of commercial floorspace, mixed use development on a site between 0.5 and 1ha or change of use proposals for buildings on land exceeding 500sq m;
 - ❖ Category “D” Proposals – including proposals of up to 9 dwellings, advertisements, provision of up to 999sq m of non residential floorspace or change of use of buildings on land exceeding 499sq m; and

❖ Category “E” Proposals – Householder and listed buildings.

9.6 Full details of our current charges can be found on our website: [Do I need planning permission? | North Herts Council \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](http://www.north-herts.gov.uk)

9.7 The council cannot insist on pre-application discussions with applicants but they are recommended. Where major schemes are proposed, the council will encourage developers to engage with the local interest groups and residents. However, it is important that councillors observe the council’s Planning Code of Good Practice.

9.8 Not all planning proposals are discussed with the council before an application is made. However, an applicant may consult at the pre-application stage, where this is appropriate, whether they are significant or more minor applications. The tables below set out how an applicant may choose to consult on their proposals.

Table 5 : Public consultation at the pre-application stage for planning applications (This includes all applications made under the Town and Country Planning Act and associated legislation.)

| Pre-Application Stage : Major Applications (see Appendix 2) | | |
|--|--|----------------------------|
| Consultation Methods | Suggested Course of Action | By Whom |
| Letters to inform local residents / interest groups of the planning application site | Send letters / emails to local residents / interest groups / relevant statutory consultees | Planning applicant / agent |
| Public exhibition or public meeting | Publicise & prepare proposals for public consultation. | Planning applicant / agent |
| Pre – Application Stage – Other Applications | | |
| Inform neighbours in the immediate vicinity | Verbal consultation | Planning applicant / agent |

9.9 Local residents often express concern regarding construction management and in particular construction vehicle access routes to development sites. Developers are strongly advised to consider construction management issues at the earliest possible stage of the planning process. It is best practice to consider sensitive and well thought out construction management plans at the pre-application stage (as part of engagement with Hertfordshire County Council Highways and the District Council) and to seek the views of the local community before planning applications are submitted. The feedback from any public consultation on construction management (including

construction vehicle access routes) should then be incorporated into the formal submission of a planning application.

- 9.10 For strategic site development proposals or schemes of significant scale and local interest, developers may also consider carrying presentations to the relevant Area Committee. The Council's Constitution (January 2020) presently states that Area Committees can receive presentations from developers for schemes for 100 dwellings or more. This threshold may change over the lifetime of this SCI. Whilst Member input into these discussions must be limited in order to avoid pre-determination by Members of the Planning Control Committee and substitutes, Area Committees would welcome early engagement for large scale development proposals through this forum.
- 9.11 Involving Planning Control Committee members in the development of strategic schemes through the planning process (recognising their potential dual role as both planning committee member and, where relevant, local ward representative) is best practice and has been promoted by the public and private sector over the past decade.
- 9.12 Officers are currently reviewing approaches to Planning Control Committee's consideration of large-scale applications. This recognises that the adoption of the Local Plan will result in a significant increase in both the scale of sites and schemes that will need to be considered and planning activity generally when compared to the Committee's role over the last 10-20 years.

Public consultation for planning applications

- 9.13 When a planning application is submitted, the council will publicise it in accordance with the legislative requirements. Where required by the legislation, this will include the following:
- ❖ Notices published in local newspapers;
 - ❖ Application details published on the website for inspection;
 - ❖ Site notices;
 - ❖ Letters sent to adjoining properties;
 - ❖ Details of all planning, listed building and conservation area consent applications are sent to councillors and the Parish or Town Councils weekly.
- 9.14 The council aims to determine all planning applications within a statutory time period, therefore all consultations that take place once a planning application has been submitted must also take place within these time limits. However, bodies such as Natural England will be allowed a longer period of time to comment on applications where this is prescribed by legislation.

9.15 The tables below set out how the council will consult at the application stage for planning proposals in the District, whether they are significant or more minor applications.

Table 6 : Consultation for Planning Applications

| Planning Application Stage | | |
|---|---|--|
| Consultation Methods | Requirements | By Whom |
| Copies of planning applications available at the libraries and the Council Offices (by appointment only) via the NHDC website | Prepare information | NHC Officers |
| Site notice | Prepare site notices. Site notices are emailed to the applicant or agent for displaying on site. Planning officers are responsible for displaying site notices where the applicant or agent is out of the district and the property is empty. | NHC Officers Applicants and / or agent |
| Neighbour notification letters | Prepare & send out letters | NHC Officers |
| Invite representations from statutory & non statutory consultees | Prepare & send out letters | NHC Officers |
| Public notice in local paper | Prepare advertisement | NHC Officers |
| Further consultations by way of exhibitions / public meetings for major applications | This would depend on the types of consultation that have taken place beforehand | Planning Applicant / Agent NHC Officers |

9.16 In some cases, there may be significant amendments to the submitted plans, in which case the council will advise those people who have previously made comments on an application. If there is a change to an application which is material or affects the description of the development, then we will re-consult. Where representations and comments are received, they will be taken into account in the determination of

applications insofar as they are material to the application. Some things are not material planning considerations, such as the impact of a scheme on property values, and therefore cannot be taken into account.

- 9.17 Local planning authorities are required to make a statement on each planning decision notice as to how they have acted pro-actively in their dealings with applicants. Even if a proposal is fundamentally unacceptable the council will handle the application in a pro-active way. This requirement in no way suggests that the application will not be assessed objectively weighing up any concerns expressed by consultees against the planning merits of the case.
- 9.18 Decisions on planning applications will either be made by the relevant Committee or under powers delegated to the Development and Conservation Manager, Principal Planning Officer (Major Projects) and Principal Planning Officer (Development Management). Any councillor can request that an application is decided by Committee instead of being determined under delegated powers, where they have a contrary view to the officer as to the probable decision or consider it raises issues of wider public interest.
- 9.19 In the case of those applications which will be reported to the Committees for decision, there is the opportunity for individuals to address the Committee to express their support or objection to the proposals. Anyone who has submitted representations will be informed if an application will be brought before committee for decision.

Post decision information

- 9.20 Once a decision has been made, the details of the decision are published online. Planning files will remain open for inspection once decisions have been made (the Part 2 register). A register of associated legal agreements (Section 106 and Section 278 agreements) will also be available for inspection.
- 9.21 The table below sets out how the council will inform the community of the decisions made on all planning applications.

Table 7 : Public Involvement – Post Decisions

| Post Application Stage | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|----------------|
| Consultation Methods | Requirements | By Whom |
| Update web site | Ensure that latest information is on the website | NHC Officers |
| Press release for major applications | Prepare information | NHC Officers |

10. NHC Resource Availability

- 10.1 The SCI is based on a realistic assessment of the likely resources available to the council in the foreseeable future. The council does not have either the staff or the financial resources to undertake large scale community and stakeholder events without impacting upon our ability to deliver important day-to-day services. The SCI sets out how the council will undertake a programme of consultation which is achievable and realistic but which will not raise expectations. In order to make the best uses of resources, the council will endeavour to combine local plan consultations with other consultations for council initiatives where this is appropriate and timely.
- 10.2 The council will be responsible for making the appropriate resources available to implement the consultation methods set out in this SCI. It is envisaged that the proposed consultation measures can be met in house.
- 10.3 The Service Director – Regulatory will be responsible for managing the overall consultation process and its implementation will be the responsibility of the Strategic Planning or the Strategic Infrastructure and Projects Teams.
- 10.4 Public consultation in relation to planning applications will be the responsibility of the council's Planning Control and Conservation Manager.

11. Reviewing the SCI

- 11.1 As required by the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2017, the SCI will be reviewed no later than five years after adoption.
- 11.2 However, as explained in paragraphs 7.4 and 7.5, there may be changes in national legislation, regulations or policies on the preparation of the masterplans, SPDs, neighbourhood plans and the local plan review. These will be monitored and if there are any significant changes, the SCI might be subject to a more immediate review.
- 11.3 The SCI will also need to be compliant with any legal requirements for the processing of data or changes to anti-discrimination laws and changes in NHDC policy.
- 11.4 The database of people and organisations will be kept up to date to comply with the General Data Protection Regulations 2016.

12. Appendices

Appendix 1 : Specific and General Consultation Bodies

In the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning)(England) Regulations 2012 “general consultation bodies” means the following

- a) voluntary bodies some or all of whose activities benefit any part of the local planning authority’s area,
- b) bodies which represent the interests of different racial, ethnic or national groups in the local planning authority’s area,
- c) bodies which represent the interests of different religious groups in the local planning authority’s area,
- d) bodies which represent the interests of disabled persons in the local planning authority’s area,
- e) bodies which represent the interests of persons carrying on business in the local planning authority’s area;

“specific consultation bodies” means the following:

- (a) the Coal Authority,
- (b) the Environment Agency,
- (c) the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England (known as English Heritage),
- (d) the Marine Management Organisation,
- (e) Natural England,
- (f) Network Rail Infrastructure Limited (company number 2904587),
- (g) the Highways Agency,
- (h) a relevant authority any part of whose area is in or adjoins the local planning authority’s area,
- (i) any person—
 - (i) to whom the electronic communications code applies by virtue of a direction given under section 106(3)(a) of the Communications Act 2003, and
 - (ii) who owns or controls electronic communications apparatus situated in any part of the local planning authority’s area,
- (j) if it exercises functions in any part of the local planning authority’s area—
 - (i) a Primary Care Trust established under section 18 of the National Health Service Act 2006 or continued in existence by virtue of that section;

- (ii) a person to whom a licence has been granted under section 6(1)(b) or (c) of the Electricity Act 1989;
- (iii) a person to whom a licence has been granted under section 7(2) of the Gas Act 1986;
- (iv) a sewerage undertaker; and
- (v) a water undertaker;
- (k) the Homes and Communities Agency; and
- (l) where the local planning authority are a London borough council, the Mayor of London;

Extract from the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning)(England) Regulations 2012

Appendix 2 : Definition of Major Development

The Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) Order 1995 (as amended)

“Major development” means development involving any 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 provision of dwellinghouses where -
 - (i) the number of dwellinghouses to be provided is 10 or more; or
 - (ii) the development is to be carried out on a site having an area of 0.5 hectare or more and it is not known whether the development falls within paragraph (c)(i);
- (d) the provision of a building or buildings where the floor space to be created by the development is 1,000 square metres or more; or
- (e) development carried out on a site having an area of 1 hectare or more.