



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Name and Date of Committee	EXECUTIVE – 12 FEBRUARY 2025
Subject	WEST OXFORDSHIRE STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT (SCI)
Wards Affected	All
Accountable Member	Councillor Hugo Ashton – Executive Member for Planning Email: hugo.ashton@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable Officer	Chris Hargraves – Head of Planning Email: chris.hargraves@westoxon.gov.uk
Report Author	Chris Hargraves – Head of Planning Email: chris.hargraves@westoxon.gov.uk
Purpose	To agree an update of the Council’s Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) in accordance with legislative requirements.
Annex	Annex A – West Oxfordshire Statement of Community Involvement - SCI (2025)
Recommendations	That the Executive resolves to: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Note the content of the report;2. Approve the updated Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) attached at Annex A;3. Delegate responsibility to the Head of Planning Services, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning, to make any minor changes to the SCI before it is finalised and published.
Corporate Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Putting Residents First• A Good Quality of Life for All• A Better Environment for People and Wildlife• Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency• Working Together for West Oxfordshire

Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	The Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) itself does not need to be subject to public consultation, rather it explains how the District Council will undertake public consultation in relation to planning matters including plan-making, development management and neighbourhood planning.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Members will be aware that local planning authorities are required to prepare a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) setting out how local communities will be engaged in respect of planning matters including plan-making and the determination of planning applications.
- 1.2 Such statements should be kept up to date, being reviewed at least once every 5 years from the date of adoption. This helps to ensure effective community involvement at all stages of the planning process.
- 1.3 The current West Oxfordshire SCI was adopted in February 2020 and has therefore been refreshed and updated to take account of various changes since including a much stronger focus on digital forms of engagement.

2. WEST OXFORDSHIRE SCI (2025)

- 2.1 The updated SCI is attached at Annex A. The basic structure of the document remains unchanged insofar as it deals with three main areas of planning and consultation – ‘district-level’ plan-making (i.e. the local plan, area action plans etc.) neighbourhood planning and development management (i.e. the processing and determination of planning applications).
- 2.2 The primary changes which have been made relate to digital engagement and the use of social media as outlined below.
Much Stronger Emphasis on Digital Engagement
- 2.3 The updated SCI reflects the Council’s increasing use of digital engagement including its digital engagement hub¹ which is now used to regularly host public consultations including those relating to the local plan and other aspects of planning policy.
- 2.4 The Council has been successful in securing a significant amount of funding from central Government under its PropTech Innovation Fund² and has used that funding to greatly increase its digital engagement capabilities.
- 2.5 The expectation is that such digital engagement tools and techniques will continue to play a significant role in the Council’s approach to stakeholder engagement moving forwards.
Increased Use of Social Media
- 2.6 The updated SCI also reflects a much greater use of social media. Planning is often seen as complex and incomprehensible and Planning Officers are keen to make it simple for people to access information quickly and easily e.g. using their smartphone.
- 2.7 Social media provides an excellent way in which this can be achieved, with a simple link allowing people to access information and respond to surveys quickly and easily.
- 2.8 Coupled with improved digital engagement tools e.g. interactive surveys etc. this should greatly increase levels of response across a much broader demographic.

¹ <https://yourvoice.westoxon.gov.uk/en-GB/>

² <https://www.localdigital.gov.uk/digital-planning/prop-tech/funding/>

3. NEXT STEPS

- 3.1 Subject to the approval of Members, the updated SCI will be published on the Council's website and also made available at the Council's main offices and various 'deposit' locations across the District.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1 The District Council could choose not to update the SCI but that would fail to reflect the legislative requirement to keep it up to date and would not properly reflect the great strides made by the District Council in recent years regarding the increased use of digital engagement tools and techniques.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The report raises no direct financial implications. There are indirect costs associated with the various forms of stakeholder engagement outlined in the SCI, but these are able to be met from existing budgets.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The preparation of a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) is a requirement of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

7. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 The report raises no specific and significant risks although failure to keep the Council's SCI up to date could be construed as contravening current planning legislation and best practice.

8. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 8.1 The nature of the SCI is such that it applies to a purposefully broad range of stakeholders and raises no direct implications for any specific equality strand.

9. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The report raises no direct implications in relation to the climate and ecological emergencies although the greater shift towards increased forms of digital engagement is likely to have a positive effect in reducing the number of hard copy documents that are printed, distributed and also received by the Council.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 None.