



West
Northamptonshire
Council

West Northamptonshire Statement of Community Involvement for the Local Plan

January 2024



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1. Introduction

1.1 What is the Statement of Community Involvement in Planning?

1.1.1 This Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) sets out how West Northamptonshire Council will engage stakeholders and the public in the production of the new West Northamptonshire Local Plan (WNLP).

1.1.2 The SCI describes how the council will ensure that the public, businesses, landowners, developers, adjoining local authorities, government agencies and any other individuals, groups and organisations within and with an interest in, the local authority's area can get involved in the creation of the WNLP aiming at shaping where we live, work and trade.

1.2 Why do we have a Statement of Community Involvement?

1.2.1 There is a legal requirement on Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) to undertake public consultation on local plans. It is important that they provide engagement that is effective and that is undertaken in a cost-effective, efficient and proportionate manner.

1.2.2 This SCI sets out how the council will do this and will establish a minimum standard of consultation and publicity.

1.2.3 The production of an SCI is required by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

1.3 Why is community involvement in planning important?

1.3.1 The planning system affects everybody who lives, works in or visits the area. It balances competing land uses and sets out the vision for how communities will be enhanced. Local communities, businesses and other organisations can contribute to this process, and it is important that they are involved at an early stage and throughout the plan making process to help inform how the area might evolve and develop over time.

1.4 Why is the Statement of Community Involvement being updated?

1.4.1 In 2021 the council prepared, consulted and adopted a new SCI to cover the preparation of a new strategic plan for West Northamptonshire. This update to that SCI has been published to reflect factual changes that have occurred since the adoption including those to the plan period, now ending in 2041, and the fact that the Council is now producing a single local plan not a strategic plan. The discussion and proposals in respect to the nature of consultation and engagement have not changed from that earlier document.

1.5 What is the scope of this SCI?

1.5.1 This SCI deals solely with the preparation of the WNLP. Other SCIs for the former West Northamptonshire authorities also remain in place and have different scopes relating to matters such as a neighbourhood planning and development management. These will remain in place until such time as they are reviewed: they are supplemented by this new West Northamptonshire SCI. It is anticipated that the council will, in due course, produce a single SCI for the whole area covering all planning processes.

1.6 Does this SCI replace the existing SCI's for each of the predecessor councils?

1.6.1 As per 1.5 above this new SCI sits alongside the existing SCIs, it does not replace them.

2 Context

2.1 The National Context

2.1.1 The Localism Act (2011) and the National Planning Policy Framework provide flexibility in determining who, when and how councils should consult and publicise information. However, whilst there is flexibility, it is a requirement that the legislation and regulations are complied with, the key elements of this are:

Localism Act 2011

2.1.2 The Localism Act 2011 includes a duty to co-operate whereby councils have to engage with specified partners, such as neighbouring authorities and other statutory bodies.

2.1.3 It also provides for the production of neighbourhood development plans. Production of a neighbourhood plan provides local communities with a greater say in deciding how planned development is accommodated in their area. It is for those preparing a neighbourhood plan to decide how best to consult during the preparation of the document, but they must comply with the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations in place at the time.

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

2.1.4 The 2012 regulations set out the procedures to be followed and provide for the use of electronic communications. They have in part been superseded by more recent regulations.

National Planning Policy Framework and National Planning Practice Guidance

2.1.5 The latest version of the National Planning Policy Framework was published in 2023. It sets out the government's vision for the planning system, including how plans

should be prepared and how planning policies should be applied in managing development. Local Plan policies must comply with this national framework. The Government also publishes National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG), which gives further guidance and advises on how local authorities are expected to prepare local planning documents and implement Government Policy. This is updated from time to time.

- 2.1.6 The NPPF highlights the importance of engagement with the community in plan-making (Paragraph 16 C) and decision taking (paragraph 39). It also promotes a plan-led system and re-iterates the duty to co-operate on planning issues that cross administrative boundaries, particularly those related to the strategic priorities, including the homes and jobs needed in the area.

2.2 The Local Context

- 2.2.1 In December 2014 the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy (Local Plan Part 1) was adopted by the West Northamptonshire Joint Strategic Planning Committee. This committee has since been revoked by Government, and the responsibility for plan making has now passed to West Northamptonshire Council. The Core Strategy sets out the long-term vision and objectives for the whole of West Northamptonshire consisting of the areas of the former Daventry District, Northampton Borough and South Northamptonshire for the plan period up to 2029, including strategic policies for steering and shaping development.

- 2.2.2 The Core Strategy provides a strategic framework to guide the preparation of the part 2 plans for each the former districts. These have progressed as follows:

- Former Daventry District – DDC adopted the Settlements and Countryside (Part 2) local plan in February 2020
- Former South Northamptonshire – SNC adopted the South Northamptonshire Local Plan (Part 2) in July 2020.
- Former Northampton Borough – the plan is at examination

- 2.2.3 The Core Strategy was five years old in December 2019. Ahead of that date work started on a new plan, then the West Northamptonshire Strategic Plan. Consultation was undertaken on an issues document in autumn 2019 and an options consultation ran from October to December in 2021.

- 2.2.4 Due to the revocation of the Joint Committee, the plan was progressed through the governance arrangements of the three predecessor councils whilst working closely together, including through the West Northamptonshire Joint Planning and Infrastructure Board.

- 2.2.5 The later stages are being governed by the West Northamptonshire Council.

3 West Northamptonshire Local Plan

3.1 How will the council consult on the Local Plan?

- 3.1.1 The council will give those with an interest in development in the area the opportunity to have their say on the Local Plan.
- 3.1.2 It is recognised that some parts of the community are not always adequately represented such as BAME, the young, economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods and the elderly. The council will work closely with relevant organisations that have experience in a particular matter to find the best way of consulting and liaising with these groups.
- 3.1.3 In preparing the plan, the council will engage with relevant stakeholders and gather evidence. It will prepare a Consultation Statement at each stage¹ setting out how this has been done, and how issues that have been raised have been considered in preparing the plan.
- 3.1.4 The council will maximise the use of email and social media to make involvement easier, quicker and more cost effective. The council is keen to explore new methods of communication and engagement with local communities, recognising that e-communications are the most appropriate way of publicising information on all aspects of the planning service to the widest possible number of people and organisations. However, the council will also take reasonable steps to ensure that sections of the community that do not have internet access are involved.

3.2 What are the consultation stages on the Local Plan?

- 3.2.1 Each stage of the plan making process is considered in turn below – a diagram showing the progression of the plan through its various stages can be seen at Diagram 1 below. The planned timing of each stage can be found in the Local Development Scheme.
- 3.2.2 In addition to the consultation requirements, the council is required by virtue of the duty to co-operate (Localism Act 2011) to engage constructively and actively with other local authorities and other bodies set out in the regulations as set out in the Duty to Co-operate section below (3.2.14-3.2.17).
- 3.2.3 A timetable for preparing the plan is set out in the West Northamptonshire Local Development Scheme, which is available on the website. This will be updated from time to time.

Issues and Options Stages

- 3.2.4 The regulations are quite flexible regarding how this stage of plan-making is undertaken. The council took the view that involving the communities and stakeholders from the outset was important and therefore separated the Issues and Options into two stages, thus feedback from the Issues stage could help inform the development of Options.

¹ i.e. Regulation 18 and Regulation 19 stages

3.2.5 The Issues stage was undertaken in autumn 2019.

3.2.6 An Options consultation ran from October to December 2021.

3.2.7 Whilst, as noted above, the regulations are quite flexible, it is a requirement that the 'specific' and 'general' consultation bodies are notified of the council's intentions to prepare a plan and to invite comments on what it ought to contain. These bodies are identified in boxes 1 and 2 below. These bodies were notified of the Issues consultation, and will be notified of the Options consultation.

Draft Document.

3.2.7 There is no requirement to produce a draft plan, therefore there are no regulations setting out who to consult. The council will however, consult:

- The specific consultation bodies set out in box 1 below
- The general consultation bodies set out in box 2 below
- Everyone on the council's Local Plan database - box 3 below

Proposed Submission Plan

3.2.8 For the submission stage of the plan there are requirements (regulation 19) to make the plan available and to notify the general and specific consultation bodies that the plan is available (boxes 1 and 2 below).

3.2.9 The council will in addition notify everyone whose contact details are on the council's local plan database (box 3).

Examination

3.2.10 Following the stages above the council submits the Local Plan to the Secretary of State together with the representations received at the Regulation 19 stage. The submitted document, and the representations received, will be considered by a Planning Inspector at an independent examination. The council will notify the specific and general consultation bodies who were invited to make representations at earlier stages, and all those who have requested to be notified, of this stage.

3.2.11 Those individuals and organisations that have made representations may be invited by the inspector to submit a written statement during the examination. Individuals and organisations that made an objection to the document and have requested to speak at the examination will be contacted by the Inspector to be informed of the procedure for being heard.

3.2.12 As part of the Examination process there could be further consultations, for example on Main Modifications and Additional Modifications to the plan. Any formal additional consultations will be for a minimum of 6 weeks.

3.2.13 The council will notify all those who have requested to be notified, as soon as reasonably practicable following the receipt of the Inspector's Report.

Duty to co-operate

3.2.14 The Localism Act 2011 places a 'duty to cooperate' on local planning authorities, county councils, neighbouring authorities² and other public bodies for any strategic cross boundary issues.

3.2.15 The duty to cooperate prescribed bodies are defined in the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012).

3.2.16 The other bodies are defined in the 2012 Regulations as:

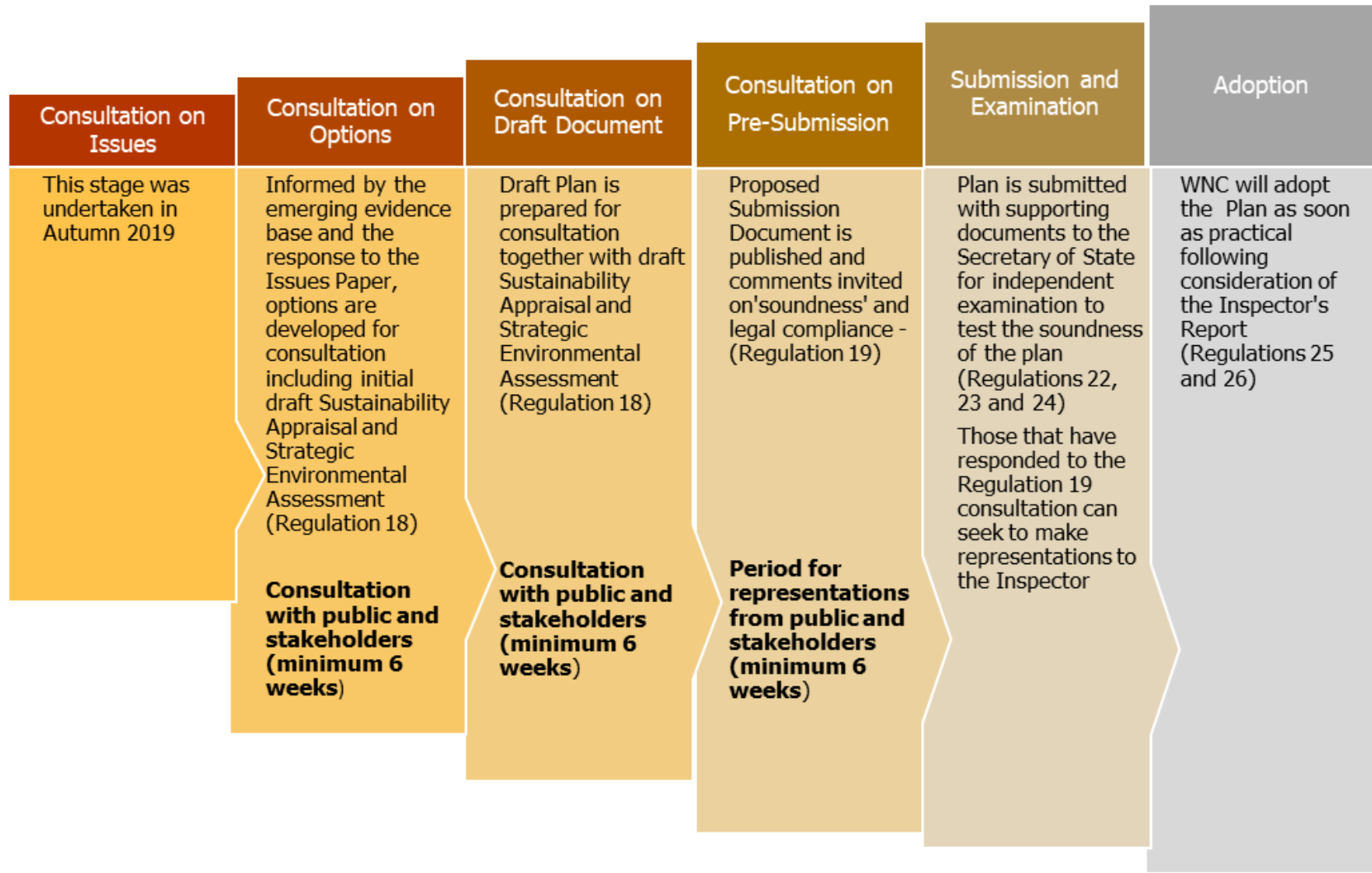
- Environment Agency;
- Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England (known as Historic England);
- Natural England;
- Mayor of London;
- Civil Aviation Authority
- Homes and Communities Agency (Homes England);
- Each clinical commissioning group established under section 14D of the National Health Service Act 2006;
- The National Health Service Commissioning Board;
- The Office of Rail and Road;
- Transport for London
- Each Integrated Transport Authority 6;
- Each highway authority within the meaning of section 1 of the Highways Act 1980 (including the Secretary of State, where the Secretary of State is the highways authority); and
- Marine Management Organisation.
- Each local enterprise partnership; and
- Each local nature partnership.

3.2.17 This is an ongoing area of activity that is recorded in the Authorities Monitoring Report.

² Rugby Borough, Harborough District, North Northamptonshire, Milton Keynes, Cherwell District, Buckinghamshire, Stratford on Avon.

Diagram 1 – key stages in the Local Plan making process

(references to regulations refer to the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012):



Box 1 – Specific Consultation Bodies

Specific Consultation Bodies (these are defined in the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012). In accordance with government regulations the following specific consultation bodies must be consulted and then notified where the council considers that they may have an interest in the subject of the proposed planning document

- (a) the Coal Authority*
- (b) the Environment Agency
- (c) the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England (known as Historic England)
- (d) the Marine Management Organisation*
- (e) Natural England
- (f) Network Rail Infrastructure Limited (company number 2904587)
- (g) a strategic highways company (for the time being appointed under Part 1 of the Infrastructure Act 2015) any part of whose area is in or adjoins the area of the local planning authority,
- (ga) Where the Secretary of State is the highway authority for any highway in the area of the local planning authority, the Secretary of State for Transport
- (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 clinical commissioning group established under section 14D of the National Health Service Act 2006;
 - (ia) the National Health Service Commissioning Board
 - (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 (Homes England); and
- (l) where the local planning authority are a London Borough council, the Mayor of London*.

* Given that there are no coal deposits in or around the area, it is not close to any coast and is not a London Borough, the council will not consult with these bodies

Box 2 – General Consultation Bodies

General Consultation Bodies (these are defined in the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012)

In accordance with government regulations the following general consultation bodies must be consulted where the council considers it appropriate:

- Voluntary bodies some or all of whose activities benefit any part of the area
- Bodies which represent the interests of different racial, ethnic or national groups in the area
- Bodies which represent the interests of different religious groups in the area
- Bodies which represent the interests of disabled persons in the area
- Bodies which represent the interests of persons carrying out business in the area

Box 3 – Other Consultees

The council maintains a database which includes local individuals, organisations, agents, landowners and businesses that have indicated they wish to be actively engaged in plan-making in the area.

Everyone on the database will be notified of any public consultation on the plan.

Anyone can request to be added or removed from the database (see box below for details). Individuals and groups who respond to a consultation on the local plan are automatically added to the database unless they expressly opt out.

Local Plan Consultation Database

Anyone wishing to receive notifications about future consultations on the local plan, can email localplan@westnorthants.gov.uk or write to the address below to be added to our consultation database or to have their details on it removed or amended.

Planning Policy Team
West Northamptonshire Council
The Forum
Moat Lane
Towcester
NN12 6AD

3.3 How will the council publicise the plan?

3.3.1 As noted above, the council will notify all specific and general consultation bodies, by email or letter, at each consultation stage. Similarly, anyone who have been added to the Local Plan database will be notified. In addition, to raise awareness of the plan and to facilitate further engagement the potential techniques that could be used include:

Internet and Social Media: The council will seek to publicise the commencement of all formal consultations on its website. The council will raise awareness of consultations through social media such as Twitter and Facebook.

Local Media: At appropriate stages during the preparation of the Plan, the council will prepare press releases to circulate to local newspapers and/or radio stations to raise awareness of consultations and to encourage community involvement.

Presentations and Attendance of Meetings: Where appropriate, and by arrangement, the council may deliver presentations, hold question and answer sessions, or attend meetings of external groups and organisations, in order to discuss particular issues.

Public Exhibitions and Meetings: Where appropriate, the council may hold exhibitions, with staffed or unstaffed drop-in sessions, to help inform the community, or hold public meetings to allow people to debate particular issues. However, such meetings can be costly, both in terms of staff time, and logistical considerations such as hiring halls, and consequently such events are likely to be arranged for groups of communities and reserved for issues that cannot effectively be dealt with in any other way.

Surveys and questionnaire – the council may utilise these to canvas views on key issues, options, proposals and documents but these will be used in an open way so as not to constrain how people respond.

Town/Parish Councils³, Neighbourhood Plan Groups and other existing community forums: Where appropriate, the council may utilise Town/Parish Council meetings, Neighbourhood Plan Group meetings as well as other existing community forums or local liaison groups, to raise awareness of, and discuss issues arising from, proposed Local Plans.

Where possible, Town/Parish Councils will be given advance notice of forthcoming consultation periods, with a view to them disseminating

³ All references to parish councils, includes parish meetings

this information to encourage the involvement of the wider community. Town/Parish Councils can provide useful local knowledge and input into key issues. The council will send direct notification of all consultations to Town/Parish Councils within West Northamptonshire, to enable them to represent the views of their local residents.

Workshops/Meetings: Where appropriate, the council will hold workshops or meetings with key stakeholders to discuss particular issues and key technical matters in depth.

3.4 How long will the council consult for?

3.4.1 Where a formal consultation is carried out, this will be for a minimum of six weeks. Where part of the consultation falls over a holiday period, where possible, the consultation period will be extended to accommodate members of the public who may be away at these times.

3.5 Where will the documents be available?

3.5.1 All consultation documents and supporting materials will be made available to view in electronic format on the councils' website from the first to the last day of the consultation period.

3.5.2 To enable members of the public without access to the internet to take part in consultations, hard copies of all consultation documents will be made available for public inspection at the main offices of the council and all local libraries where this is possible and safe having regard to any government advice regarding COVID 19 or similar. The council will also seek to identify other suitable deposit points such as shops and community halls.

3.5.3 Copies of consultation documents can be sent to interested parties upon request, either in CD or paper format, however these may be subject to a fee to cover the costs associated with production, postage and packaging.

3.5.4 All documents will be produced in plain English. At different stages of the local planning process, the council may produce summary leaflets to inform and stimulate debate and dialogue about key.

3.6 How can comments on the Local Plan (representations) be submitted?

3.6.1 Comments can be submitted in writing, electronically via email or an online consultation portal (if available).

3.6.2 With the exception of the Regulation 18 stage (see 3.2.4 – 3.2.7), comments can only be made during the prescribed consultation

periods. Anything received outside of those periods will not be considered.

3.6.3 Verbal comments will not be recorded, because it is important that all comments are accurately represented,

3.6.4 Representations received will be published on the councils' website in their original form and may also be summarised. Names and addresses, but not company names will be redacted.

3.6.5 The council has published a Privacy Notice, regarding how it will handle representations and your personal data submitted with those representations. This can be viewed on the council's website.

3.6.6 Any comments that contravene compliance with the Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010 will not be accepted or published.

3.7 How will the council feedback on consultation responses

3.7.1 All comments made during the consultation periods will be carefully considered and will be reported to the relevant committee. A report summarising the consultation activities and the comments made and how these have informed the next stage of plan making will be prepared for each stage. This report will be made available on the council's website

3.8 How will the council keep you informed

3.8.1 Throughout the process of preparing planning policy documents, from the earliest stages through to adoption, community and stakeholders will be kept informed of progress as follows:

- The latest version of any the Plan will be made available on the council's website;
- The council will acknowledge all representations received by electronic means (email or online forms) at formal consultation stages;
- Reports to council meetings will be available on the council's website and these meetings are held in public;
- The council will inform those who asked to be notified when the document has been submitted to the Secretary of State and will publish a consultation summary report on the council's website together with the representations submitted at the Publication stage. These representations will be made available for public inspection and will be identifiable by name or organisation;
- Any person who makes representations at the Regulation 19 stage seeking to change the Plan may request the opportunity to appear before the person carrying out the Examination;
- The final, adopted Plan will be published on the council's website; and

- Information will be supplied on the council’s website to provide an up-to-date position on the progress of the plan whenever possible and a planning policy email inbox will be made available for the community and stakeholders to assist with further enquiries.

4 Dealing with Extraordinary Circumstances

- 4.1.1 The COVID 19 Pandemic, which started in early 2020, has demonstrated that circumstances can arise beyond the control of the local authority that result in it not being able to implement normal consultation and engagement activities set out in the SCI. It is thus necessary to have in place a mechanism to deal with this, in order that, where appropriate, plan making is not held up.
- 4.1.2 In cases where the usual consultation and engagement activities set out in this SCI cannot be carried out due to extraordinary circumstances, the council can modify such processes provided that reasonable opportunities are still provided for engagement. This could for instance include cancellation of public meetings and replacement with some form of other opportunity to contact officers e.g. through virtual meetings. Any legal requirements would still apply, so if they could not be complied with, the consultation would have to be postponed or reconvened at a later date.
- 4.1.3 In deciding how to proceed, the council will have regard to:
- What proportion of the consultation/engagement activity would be affected
 - What alternatives can be put in place to give people the opportunity to engage
 - What stage the plan has reached
- 4.1.4 The decision about how to proceed will be taken by the portfolio holder for the West Northamptonshire Council having taken advice from officers.

5 Review

- 5.1.1 The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2017, state that LPAs in England must review their SCI every five years to ensure it is kept up to date and reflects current legislation and best practice.
- 5.1.2 It is, however, intended that a review will be undertaken sooner than that to address how West Northamptonshire Council will undertake consultation and engagement on planning processes not covered by this SCI.