

## Local Plan Communication and Engagement Plan

### Background

Proposals for the new West Northamptonshire Local Plan (WNLP) will be presented in a public consultation to stakeholders in spring 2024.

The Council will strive to 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, West Northamptonshire can get involved in the creation of the WNLP.

The Planning Services 'Statement of Community Involvement' (SCI), adopted September 2021, sets out how the council will establish a minimum standard of consultation and publicity in its work on the WNLP.

This document builds on that and outlines the engagement, communication and consultation approach and activities which will be undertaken and seeks to engage a broad demographic audience with a clear call to action to encourage responses to and involvement in the consultation to provide the public with opportunities to have their say on proposals which will affect them.

The SCI commits the Council to working closely with relevant organisations to consult with under-represented community groups and those groups identified through the Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA).

The core message of the communication strategy is ***Help shape the future growth of your local area and have your say on the local plan for West Northamptonshire***

This current communication and engagement strategy focuses on engagement activity for the emerging Regulation 18 consultation prior to the formal eight-week consultation in April 2024.

### Aims and Objectives

1. Inform stakeholders of proposals in the local plan, what the purpose of the local plan is and what the benefits are as well as a brief description of plan-making process generally.
2. Create a strong call to action by outlining the relevance of the local plan and the impact that local planning policies have on their community.
3. Ensure the message and call to action gets across to the broadest possible demographic.
4. Convey a detailed and complex planning document in an accessible way so that stakeholders, interested parties and the community, who are not planners can understand and provide feedback.
5. Encourage engagement and responses from seldom heard groups that typically have a lower engagement.
6. Demonstrate how peoples' opinions gathered in the consultation have been considered in the preparation of the local plan.

### Key Messages

- The local plan guides planning decisions across West Northamptonshire.

- The new local plan will replace four existing plans.  
<https://www.westnorthants.gov.uk/planning-policy>
- The Plan will deliver Council priorities and set a spatial strategy for the area to 2041
- People can get involved in the consultation and help shape the future of their local area by completing the survey.
- People are invited to have their say on planning policies, allocations and guidance which impact their local area.
- After the consultation explain how feedback from the consultation has been used in the preparation of the local plan.

### **Communicating with key stakeholders**

#### **Key methods of communication that we will use to engage with communities and stakeholders as we progress the plan, which include:**

Corporate communications channels:

##### Online

- WNC website
- WNC social media channels
- Press and media
- Video creation

##### Offline

- In person exhibitions and meetings
- Print materials:
  - Leaflets
  - Postcards
  - Posters

#### Targeting those with limited or no access to social media / internet

Having an online consultation, with promotion via social media advertising, potentially creates a barrier for those do not have access to these platforms. Other methods of consultation are identified to ensure that this group can be reached. , This includes running engagement sessions at community centres/places of interest . The following channels to support this could also be used:

- Wallpapers on public library computers
- Posters in libraries (self-print) as well as Welcoming Spaces and GPs (would have to print and distribute – paid)
- Posters in customer contact centres
- Holding exhibitions, promote these through the newsletters and channels mentioned above
- Local newsletters such as Age UK Northamptonshire, Towcester Crier, NN central, About my area

The below groups have been identified as key stakeholders, in addition to statutory consultees and duty to cooperate bodies, which the Council will seek to engage with as part of the engagement and consultation.

### Residents (general approach)

All of the key messages should be communicated with residents / interested parties, helping them to understand the local plan and creating a strong call to action, as well as signposting them to the consultation

#### Proposed activity

- Social media posts signposting to the consultation
- Short video explaining aspects of the plan, aimed at an audience that are unfamiliar with planning
- Residents e-newsletter to launch the consultation and reminder
- Press release to launch the consultation
- Media coverage in the local press
- Public meetings/exhibitions – with social media posts promoting these exhibitions
- Alert via consultation register and residents' panel
- WNC app
- Printed publication sent to every household (West Northants Life)
- Copies of the consultation and draft Local Plan in the Council's hubs/libraries etc

### Residents (targeted approach)

To reach the broadest possible demographics we are going to have to take a targeted approach to groups that typically have less interaction with consultations.

#### Targeting young people:

Explain the importance of the plan for young people and how it will impact them, ensuring they understand the value of their input. We could engage young people on the following channels:

- Short form video explaining the importance for young people to have an input (TikTok and Instagram Reels)
- Creating engaging and informative social media graphics/content inspired by current digital trends (such as memes, viral posts, TikTok trends etc.)
- Information pack for college students, run a session with local colleges (especially for those studying Public Services or Politics)
- Sponsored social media posts (younger age groups unlikely to follow and engage with the council's social media, so would need promotion)
- Youth Forum at WNC

### WNC elected members

In order to engage with members, as well as to enable members to use their own channels to signpost to the WNLPC consultation, we will create asset packs and comms toolkits for both WNC members as well as Town and Parish councillors.

Create asset pack/comms toolkit containing posters, social media graphics, suggested social media captions, timetable for suggested sharing, timeline of planned comms activity from WNC so that members can support (coordinate their comms, repost from WNC socials etc.), a factsheet/FAQs so members can resolve any resident enquiries related to the proposed Local Plan.

The Members Briefing and the Towns and Parishes Briefing can be used to engage directly with elected members, in addition we can use these channels to share the comms toolkit as well as remind members to share on our behalf and engage their constituents.

### Targeting rural communities

Rural areas see a comparatively higher engagement with planning consultations, in order to maintain/increase engagement with rural communities we should produce communications on the specific impacts and potential benefits the WNLP will have on rural areas. Possible organic channels for rural targeting include:

- Article in town and parish council newsletter
- Parish council forum
- Parish Council briefing
- Parish Council social medias (will require a comms toolkit)
- Community/'Spotted' Facebook groups
- Northamptonshire Association for Local Council (NALC) newsletters/bulletin

### Targeting urban communities

Urban areas have seen lower engagement with planning consultations and so require some targeted communications about how the WNLP will affect urban communities in order to create a strong call to action. Possible organic channels for this include:

- Town Council meetings
- Town Council social medias (will require a comms toolkit)
- Community/'spotted' Facebook groups (for urban areas)
- Public meetings/exhibitions

### Businesses

Releasing press releases and social media posts that highlight specifically the impact of the local plan on local businesses.

WNC's Economic Development team will liaise with businesses and encourage them to engage with the consultation through:

- Economic development newsletter
- Social media channels
- Developers Forum

### Town and Parish Councillors

Town and Parish Councillors are in the unique position to know their wards extremely well and understand the planning related issues affecting their residents. Having their input will be valuable as they will be able to raise local issues.

To encourage engagement, we will invite them to engage through the Towns and Parishes Briefing and share information with local residents through their channels.

We will provide the councils and their councillors with comms toolkits so they can promote and signpost to the local plan consultation on their socials as well as promote any engagement sessions or public exhibitions that are happening in their area.

The SCI commits the Council to working closely with relevant organisations to consult with under-represented community groups. Once the EQIA screening is complete the Planning Policy Team will work closely with the Council's communication experts to build on work that has been undertaken to further address this commitment. Established WNC groups and forums that could be used include

- Women's Forum
- LGBTQ People and Allies Forum
- Diverse Communities Forum
- Disabled Peoples Forum
- Faith Groups
- Youth Forum
- [Local Area Partnerships | West Northamptonshire Council \(westnorthants.gov.uk\)](https://www.westnorthants.gov.uk)

This document identifies both methods of consultation as well as types of groups to be consulted however it should be noted this list is not exhaustive. It is anticipated that as the local plan progresses consultation the types of groups who are consulted and the methods used are likely to evolve and these will be adapted accordingly.

### **Timeline overview**

December 2023 – Development of key messages with planning leads

Early 2024 – Write consultation documentation, draft press releases, write social media posts, create social media graphics, plan engagement sessions

Before consultation launch – Release comms explaining the local plan and how it impacts stakeholders, notify them that a consultation is opening soon whilst raising awareness of and informing them about the local plan. Advertise local engagement sessions.

During consultation (Spring 2024) – Release comms about how to be involved in the consultation (including where, when and how), importance of the local plan and the value of the input, advertise the local engagement sessions.

## Timeline

Date	Comms activity	Notes
<b>Planning</b>		
Dec 2023	Development of key messages and communication strategy with planning leads	
w/c 18 Dec 2023	Finalise LP Communication and Engagement plan with planning leads	Plan ideally should be completed before the holidays due to the deadline for S&O
31 Jan 2024	Scrutiny and Overview Committee	
w/c 8 February 2024	Feedback from S&O, make any changes to comms plan as required	
Late Jan 2024	Scope out organic and other free channels that can be used to promote the WNLP consultation	WNC, T/P Council and community newsletters that we can promote in for free  Community groups and forums that we can hold engagement sessions with
	Scope out newsletters that can be used and their content deadlines	
Late Jan 2024	Plan engagement activity with WNC forums	Arrange engagement sessions to take place in the weeks immediately before and after the launch of the consultation
	Plan community engagement sessions (exhibitions) Book venues for exhibitions	Session will inform stakeholders of the WNLP, explain technical details, inform them how to take part in the consultation, allow stakeholders to ask questions
Early Feb 2024	Draft press releases	General PR about WNLP PR to promote community exhibitions PR to announce launch of consultation PR specifically targeted towards businesses
	Draft newsletters and articles	Article about WNLP generally, explaining planning and the importance of the new LP Article to announce the launch of the consultation

Early Feb 2024	Write social media posts	Posts explaining WNLP, posts to promote the various PRs, posts explaining the importance of having a say and to signpost to the consultation
Early Feb 2024	Scope out exactly what graphics are required, determine what help is needed from SF to make these or create some of the branding	Assets for social media posts Graphic to include with PRs
Mid Feb 2024	Create graphics and branding for campaign, including posters and social media assets	Posters for library/customer contact centres PC Wallpaper
Late Feb 2024	Draft script for WNLP explained video(s) with planning leads. Coordinate with a senior officer or member on this (if we are doing video not animation)	Video explaining aspects of the WNLP Video about importance of taking part in the WNLP consultation for target groups (if we have funding for social media posts)
	Video, edit and finalise video(s)	
Late Feb 2024	Create a comms toolkit for Town and Parish Councils and other partner organisations	Include graphics, social media captions, timeline for suggested sharing and reposting socials, posters, factsheet, FAQs
	Create a comms toolkit for elected members	
<b>Engagement (launch comms March 2024)</b>		
w/c 4 Mar 2024	Send out comms toolkits to partners, councils and councillors	Launch of the engagement communications, social media posts scheduled throughout March to provide information on the WNLP and make residents aware of the upcoming consultation
	PR – general information about the WNLP	
	Social media – general information about WNLP	
Mid Mar 2024	Members Briefing	Briefing for elected members, can explain aspects of WNLP, remind them to share comms on their channels, remind them of upcoming consultation
	Town and Parish Briefing	
Late Mar and throughout Apr	PR – community exhibitions	
	Social media – community exhibitions	
	Hold community exhibitions	
March	Put articles in any newsletters possible	Just information about WNLP, although consultation won't be live so no QR code
Late Mar	Article in West Northants Life	Does distribution line up with when the consultation will be live? Check content deadline

Late Mar	PR/social media – Why WNLP is important for businesses	Targeting groups to explain the WNLP, convey the importance to target groups and create a strong call to action ready for consultation launch
	PR/social media – Why WNLP is important for young people	
<b>Consultation (launch April 2024)</b>		
April (for launch)	Consultation goes live	
	PR – consultation launch	
	Social media – consultation launch	
	Members Briefing and Towns and Parishes Briefing	
	Roll out PC wallpapers on public/library and staff computers	Include QR code for the consultation
April	Continue to hold community exhibitions	
April	Put articles in any newsletters possible	Signpost through to the consultation with a QR code
<b>Post Consultation</b>		
May	Consultation Closes	
May-July	Consultation Analysis	
August	Consultation Feedback	