

## EAST SUFFOLK COUNCIL

### TEMPORARY SUSPENSION OF PARTS OF STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT FOR PLANNING POLICY PURPOSES

#### URGENT ACTION

#### ACTION FOR WHICH HEAD OF PLANING AND COASTAL MANAGEMENT HAS DELEGATED POWERS

#### SUBJECT MATTER:

The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended), the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended), and the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (as amended) set out certain requirements in relation to public consultation measures.

The Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) is a statutory planning document which the Council is required to prepare by legislation. The SCI reflects the regulatory requirements and also sets out the Council's complementary measures.

The matters subject of this note are:

1. To suspend part of the Council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) insofar as it relates to the provision of **hard copies of consultation documents at Council offices and Local Libraries** for a period of 20 weeks from 27 April 2020 subject to [a] review in the event that the government changes the requirements for social distancing and isolation related to Covid-19 within that period or [b] review on or before 11 September 2020.
2. To suspend part of the Councils' Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) insofar as it relates to the **preparation of Neighbourhood Plans**, and to be accompanied by the provision of associated **advice to neighbourhood planning groups** in relation to consultation on neighbourhood plans, for a period of 20 weeks from 27 April 2020 subject to [a] review in the event that the government changes the requirements for social distancing and isolation related to Covid-19 within that period or [b] review on or before 11 September 2020.

#### MEETING TO WHICH MATTER RELATES:

Full Council. The Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) is a Policy document adopted by Full Council.

The Statement of Community Involvement for East Suffolk Council comprises:

- How to get involved in local planning – Statement of Community Involvement (adopted by Suffolk Coastal District Council, September 2014)  
(<https://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy-and-local-plans/suffolk-coastal-local-plan/existinglocal-plan/statement-of-community-involvement/>)

- How to get involved in local planning – Statement of Community Involvement (adopted by Waveney District Council, September 2014) (<https://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/assets/Planning/Waveney-Local-Plan/Statement-of-Community-Involvement/1Statement-of-Community-Involvement-September-2014.pdf>)

#### REASON FOR ACTION BEING TAKEN OUT OF MEETING:

Full Council is not presently meeting and there is a need to progress with the preparation of Local Plan documents and Supplementary Planning Documents, and continue to provide appropriate advice and support to neighbourhood plan groups.

#### Local Plans and Supplementary Planning Documents

Arrangements set out in the SCI for the preparation of Local Plans and Supplementary Planning Documents require, amongst a range of other consultation measures, that hard copies of consultation documents are made available for inspection ‘at Council offices’ and ‘at local libraries and other local public places considered appropriate’. With current social distancing restrictions as the result of Covid-19, it is not possible to fulfil this requirement. In order to continue to progress Local Plan documents and provide opportunities for people to be involved in a safe manner it is appropriate to suspend the SCI temporarily and in part and to provide alternative arrangements.

#### Neighbourhood Plans

Whilst the Statement of Community Involvement does not set out specific requirements related to the conduct of consultations associated with the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans, it does highlight the Local Planning Authority’s role in publicising in relation to applications for neighbourhood areas and in relation to publicising Neighbourhood Planning proposals (under Regulation 16 of the Neighbourhood Plan Regulations). The Council also provides support to Neighbourhood Plans groups on their own consultations which are also set out in the Statement of Community Involvement.

It is prudent to partially suspend the East Suffolk Council Statement of Community Involvement in so far as the above relates to the provision of hard copies of consultation documents at Council offices and local libraries.

In addition all neighbourhood plan referendums will be postponed until 6<sup>th</sup> May 2021, in line with the [Local Government and Police and Crime Commissioner \(Coronavirus\) \(Postponement of Elections and Referendums\) \(England and Wales\) Regulations 2020](#).

#### RECOMMENDED ALTERNATIVE:

The Council’s alternative approaches to ensure continued participation in consultations are set out below. Should any Government guidance or amendments to legislation be published the Council will react accordingly.

For all consultations, the Council will carefully consider whether it is safe, feasible and appropriate to carry out a consultation, in a way that does not prejudice the ability of

people to be engaged in terms of fairness and equality. The Council may in some cases need to adjust its timescales for document preparation accordingly.

All consultation documents will continue to be made available via the Council's website.

### Local Plans and Supplementary Planning Documents

For those that are not able to view the consultation documents online hard copies will be made available and posted out where possible (free of charge) on request. This will be communicated in consultation material.

Should anyone be unable to submit a response online or by email and be unable to leave their home to post a response the Council will consider bespoke measures on a case by case basis to enable people to respond.

The Council will be clear in its correspondence as to how officers can be contacted via phone when not in the office.

Consultation periods will be extended to provide time for accessing documents and responding.

Arrangements will be kept under review throughout consultations.

### Neighbourhood Plans

Neighbourhood planning groups will be advised to defer Regulation 14 consultations until the advice to stay at home has been eased.

Neighbourhood planning groups will also be recommended to defer Regulation 16 consultations until stay at home advice has been eased. Where groups express a clear resolution to continue with a Regulation 16 consultation, the Council will employ pragmatic steps to make the consultation as inclusive as possible. This is likely to include, but is not limited to: extended consultation period, posters in key locations that remain accessible, press release and printed elements provided on request.

All neighbourhood plan referendums will be postponed until 6<sup>th</sup> May 2021, in line with the [Local Government and Police and Crime Commissioner \(Coronavirus\) \(Postponement of Elections and Referendums\) \(England and Wales\) Regulations 2020](#). No alternative measures are possible.

The Council will provide advice to neighbourhood planning groups in relation to the above.

BACKGROUND:

### Local Plan and Supplementary Planning Documents

1. The Council is currently in the advanced stages of the production of the Suffolk Coastal Local Plan. Having been submitted in March 2019 hearing sessions were held in August and September 2019. Consultation on proposed Main Modifications will

need to undertaken before the Inspector can finalise his report on the 'soundness' of the Local Plan. There are no specific regulatory requirements related to a Main Modifications consultation and, following the Planning Inspectorate guidance 'Procedure Guidance for Local Plan Examination (June 2019)', the Council would usually follow the 'scope and duration' of consultation held at the Submission stage as set out in the Statement of Community Involvement.

2. The Council is currently producing Supplementary Planning Documents. Public consultation is required during the production of Supplementary Planning Documents.
3. In view of the current Covid-19 social distancing measures, it is not possible to fulfil the relevant requirements of the SCI in relation to the provision of hard copy documents during Local Plan and Supplementary Planning Document consultations. Failure to comply with the requirements of the SCI could result in legal challenges being brought which would impact on the weight applied to planning policy documents in planning decisions.

### Neighbourhood Planning

4. Neighbourhood Planning advice has been issued by the Government including updates to [Planning Practice Guidance](#) and an [FAQs document](#). This information is being shared with all East Suffolk Neighbourhood Plan groups.
5. Regulation 14 consultations require community engagement and encourage feedback and exchange of views with the public. As such these will be extremely difficult to carry out effectively whilst complying with the stay at home advice.
6. Regulation 16 consultations seek views on the final draft plan and are less geared towards engagement. It is preferable for groups to delay to ensure the consultation is as inclusive as possible.
7. Legislation came into force on 7<sup>th</sup> April 2020 to postpone elections and referendums (including Neighbourhood Plan referendums) until at least 6<sup>th</sup> May 2021. See: [Local Government and Police and Crime Commissioner \(Coronavirus\) \(Postponement of Elections and Referendums\) \(England and Wales\) Regulations 2020](#). The Council will therefore not be holding any Neighbourhood Plan referendums during this time.
8. The SCI refers to the Local Planning Authority's role in arranging the Examination. The Council will continue to do this and support the process. If social distancing measures have an impact on parts of the Examination, such as site visits, the Council will work with the Examiner and Neighbourhood Plan groups accordingly.

#### FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

There may be increased printing and postage costs resulting from increased demand for hard copies of consultation documents.

Failure to comply with the requirements of the SCI could result in legal challenge. If this were to occur there would be significant associated costs.

#### ACTION AUTHORISED:

1. To suspend part of the Councils' Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) insofar as it relates to the-provision of **hard copies of consultation documents at Council offices and Local Libraries** for a period of 20 weeks from 27 April 2020 subject to [a] review in the event that the government removes requirements for social distancing and isolation related to Covid-19 within that period or [b] review on or before 11 September 2020. Hard copies will be made available and posted out where possible (free of charge) on request. This will be communicated in consultation material.
2. To suspend part of the Councils' Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) insofar as it relates to publicity and consultation associated with the preparation of **Neighbourhood Plans** and to provide associated **advice to neighbourhood planning groups** in relation to consultation on neighbourhood plans for a period of 20 weeks from 27 April 2020 subject to [a] review in the event that the government removes requirements for social distancing and isolation related to Covid-19 within that period or [b] review on or before 11 September 2020.
3. To postpone all **neighbourhood plan referendums** until at least 6<sup>th</sup> May 2021, in line with the [Local Government and Police and Crime Commissioner \(Coronavirus\) \(Postponement of Elections and Referendums\) \(England and Wales\) Regulations 2020](#).

DATE ACTION AUTHORISED: 1<sup>st</sup> May 2020

Signed:  Dated: 1<sup>st</sup> May 2020

Philip Ridley BSc(Hons) MRTPI Head of Planning and Coastal Management