

AM 654/23

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 13 JULY 2023

STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT ON PLANNING MATTERS – ADOPTION

Report by: David Illsley, Policy & Conservation Manager

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Engaging local communities is core to the work of the New Forest National Park Authority. This includes the delivery of our statutory planning functions (e.g. development control, plan-making, enforcement), as well as our wider work as part of 'Team New Forest' and on promoting an inclusive National Park (e.g. the work of our education officers, communications team, rangers and other specialists).
- 1.2 Our statutory planning functions are delivered within a national framework that includes certain legal requirements for involving stakeholders, consultees and the public in our work. As part of this, all planning authorities must prepare a 'Statement of Community Involvement' (SCI) setting out how and when they will involve the community and other interested people in the preparation of their planning policies and guidelines; and how the community can be involved in decisions on planning applications.
- 1.3 As set out in report AM 648/23 considered at the March 2023 Authority meeting, our current SCI was prepared in 2013 and guided consultation on the updated Local Plan (adopted 2019). With recent changes in national policy it is an appropriate time to revise our SCI in advance of work commencing on a review of our local planning policies. In March 2023 members endorsed the revised draft SCI to be published for the purposes of public consultation which took place between April and June. This report summarises the consultation undertaken, the responses received and the recommended amendments to the final version of the SCI now presented for adoption (Annex 1).

2. Public consultation on the revised draft Statement of Community Involvement

- 2.1 The National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) resource on 'Plan Making' confirms, 'There is no requirement for local planning authorities to consult when reviewing and updating their Statement of Community Involvement.' Despite this, it was agreed at the March 2023 Authority meeting that an update to the document setting out how we engage communities in our planning work should rightly be subject to consultation.
- 2.2 The seven-week public consultation on the revised draft SCI ran from 17 April to 5 June 2023. The 'Consultation Statement' set out in Annex 2 to this report provides more detail of the consultation undertaken, with the main headlines including:
 - Over 220 consultees were directly notified of the consultation and received a link to the relevant information (including details of how to respond). This included: (i) 'specific consultees', such as Natural England and Historic England; (ii) adjacent local planning authorities; (iii) all town and parish councils in the National Park; (iii) other 'general consultees'; (iv) local green groups; (v) Estates in the National Park; and (vi) active planning agents within the National Park.

- A press release was issued on 17 April 2023 setting out how people could respond – see [Have your say on how the National Park Authority involves people in its planning work - New Forest National Park Authority \(newforestnpa.gov.uk\)](https://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/press-releases/have-your-say-on-how-the-national-park-authority-involves-people-in-its-planning-work)
- The press release resulted in articles in local media, including a piece in the Lymington Times on 21 April summarising the aims of the consultation and highlighting how people could respond.
- The consultation was promoted through our usual social media channels, including Facebook and Twitter.
- Updates were provided at the parish quadrant meetings that took place during the consultation period – namely the South East Quadrant meeting in Exbury on 26 April and the North East Quadrant meeting in Bramshaw on 27 April. An update was also provided at the New Forest Consultative Panel meeting on 1 June 2023.
- All of the consultation information was available to view and download on our website at [Community involvement - New Forest National Park Authority \(newforestnpa.gov.uk\)](https://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/community-involvement). Copies of all of the consultation information were also made available at our reception at Lymington Town Hall for the public to inspect.

3. Summary of the consultation responses received and recommended revisions

3.1 The ‘Consultation Statement’ in Annex 2 provides further detail on the seven-week consultation and the comments received. The level of response was low, but comments were received from a range of consultees including local residents, town & parish councils and other consultees. The table below summarises the main changes recommended to the document following consideration of the responses. It should be noted there is no requirement to set out the consultation responses received verbatim, but instead to summarise the main points raised. Where revisions are recommended, these are also highlighted in tracked changes in the document in Annex 1.

Respondent	Summary of main points	Recommended response
Ringwood Society	Please add the Ringwood Society to the list of consultees	Agreed and changes made to the consultation database. The Ringwood Society is a ‘general consultee’ and the SCI itself does not list all of these in full.
Local resident	Not all residents have access to the internet and the journey to Lymington Town Hall is long for some.	Amend text to include reference to the potential availability of paper copies upon request, for a small fee in some cases.
Local resident	Independent planning advice seems to be only obtainable from a website or by email - no phone number or advice for those residents without access to the internet.	Planning Aid is an external charitable organisation separate from the National Park Authority. Amend text to add in a telephone number for the service.
Melchet Park and Plaitford Parish Council	The term ‘neighbour’ should be defined and not left to the discretion of the officer to decide who should or should not be informed of a planning application.	The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 requires planning authorities to serve notice on "any adjoining owner or occupier" when an

		application is submitted. The NPA's approach is to directly notify properties with a contiguous boundary or opposite the site of a planning application. The case officer also has discretion to notify additional properties where appropriate. This meets the legal requirements and is the approach adopted by many other planning authorities. It is recommended that additional wording is added to paragraph 10.2 to clarify this.
Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB	The AONB is disappointed not to be specifically listed in Appendix 1 as a consultee on planning policy documents. This is presumably an omission as the NPA has consulted the AONB on Local Plan, SPDs, and Management Plan matters.	Appendix 1 of the SCI lists the 'specific consultees' as per the relevant regulations, but does not list the 'general consultees' as there are a lot of relevant local organisations which can change over time. The AONB would definitely be considered a 'general consultee' to be consulted on relevant planning policy documents. However, it is not considered necessary to individually name all the relevant organisations and bodies.
Fawley Parish Council	Clarification of the definition of 'neighbours' should be made for the purposes of notifying people of planning applications (paragraph 10.2).	Agree to add additional wording to paragraph 10.2 – see response to Melchet Park & Plaitford Parish Council's comments (above).

4. Conclusions

- 4.1 With work on the review of the adopted local planning policies covering the National Park due to pick up in 2023/24, now is an appropriate time to ensure our commitments to engaging local communities and others in our statutory planning work are up to date. The revised SCI has been updated in line with the current national guidance and regulations. It ensures the Authority meets its legal obligations and it will remain an option to go beyond these minimum requirements as resources allow.
- 4.2 Although there is no legal obligation to do so, the draft revised SCI was subject to a seven-week public consultation between April and June. The consultation responses received – although limited in number – have all been considered and subsequent changes proposed to the document now presented for adoption in Annex 1. Members are recommended to approve the revised SCI to ensure our approach to engaging people in our planning work is up to date and publicly available.
- 4.3 The intention is to make the adopted document available online as an electronic version, rather than printing a significant number of paper copies. It should be noted that future minor amendments or factual updates to the SCI (such as updating references to Government regulations or guidance) would not be subject to consultation.

Recommendation:

Members approved the revised Statement of Community Involvement (Annex 1) to guide our engagement with consultees in our statutory planning work.

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Papers: **AM 654/23** – cover paper

Annex 1 – Revised New Forest National Park Authority Statement of Community Involvement for adoption

Annex 2 – Consultation Statement – summarising how people were consulted and the main responses received

Equality Impact Assessment: No impacts have been identified. National planning regulations set out minimum requirements on how planning authorities must engage communities and other stakeholders in their work and the revised document in Annex 1 meets these requirements.