

Milton Keynes Council’s Statement of Community Involvement (2020)

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1. Context

Introduction

1.1 The Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) sets out how Milton Keynes Council (MKC) will engage with local communities and stakeholders in the development of planning policy documents and in the determination of planning applications within the Borough.

1.2 The requirement to prepare an SCI was introduced in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. MKC adopted its first SCI in December 2006 which was revised in March 2014. In response to changes to the planning process and new ways of engaging with members of the public and other stakeholders, including the growth of social media (e.g. Twitter, Facebook and e-portals surveys) MKC has decided to review its SCI. The intention is to reflect the most up-to-date processes and procedures that will be used by the Council as part of its future planning consultations.

1.3 The **benefits** of preparing an SCI are broadly known and have been extensively researched. This includes:

1. ***Resolving potential conflicts between parties at an early stage***
2. ***Generating local ownership and fostering community pride***
3. ***Better understanding of local community priorities***
4. ***Introducing greater clarity and transparency in decision making***
5. ***Stakeholders have a great awareness to how they should and how they can be engaged through the planning process***

1.4 A draft SCI was made available for consultation for an eight-week period between 14 January and 8 March 2019. Comments were received from 18 individuals and organisations and the document was updated to take account of those representations.

1.5 This document was subsequently adopted by the Cabinet of Milton Keynes Council at its meeting on 9 July 2019.

Importance of engagement and consultation

1.6 The Council takes public and stakeholder engagement extremely seriously and does not simply see it as a tokenistic process. In the spirit of Localism and at a time when Neighbourhood Planning in Milton Keynes is becoming increasingly widespread, the Council intends to present how the community gets involved in plan-making and its impact on the planning decisions that result from it.

1.7 Planning is fundamental to shaping the neighbourhoods and communities in which we all live and work. MKC considers it important that everyone has the opportunity to be involved in and influence decisions that are made through the planning process. The **National Planning Policy Framework 2019** (NPPF) confirms this at paragraph 16c and states that plans should:

“be shaped by early, proportionate and meaningful engagement between plan-makers and communities, local organisations, businesses, infrastructure providers and statutory consultees”.

1.8 Ensuring we engage effectively with stakeholders throughout the planning process also reflects the Council's commitment to equality and its three core values:

1. We are responsive;
2. We are collaborative;
3. We put our customers first.

The Intention

1.9 The SCI sets out the consultation and engagement processes that will be used in preparing planning policy and supplementary/supporting documents and in determining planning applications. It explains the statutory requirements that the Council must meet at each stage and what other consultation or engagement processes may be undertaken in addition to these minimum requirements. This gives the public and stakeholders certainty over what sort of engagement they can expect within the planning process and the different ways they can get involved. Through the preparation of this document, we also sought support from partners and other local organisations about the assistance they can provide in sharing information and

facilitating discussions with their groups, members or contacts. Therefore, the SCI sets the framework for planning-related consultations which will enable the Council to demonstrate how it has met the requirements of the planning regulations.

1.10 The legal requirements also include making documents available at the local planning authority office ([how to find us](#)) during set consultation periods and letters or emails will be sent to all identified statutory bodies and organisations. The SCI sets out the techniques available and likely to be used by the Council as it is important to retain a degree of flexibility so that methods can be appropriately tailored to a specific planning document. The intention is that this will allow for changes in the regulations or best practice guidance, and to reflect any new methods of communication and engagement that may become available over the life of the document.

Principles of community involvement in planning

1.11 As part of consultation and engagement through the planning process, the Council will work by the following core principles:

- We will meet and where practicably possible exceed the minimum standards for community involvement set out in legislation.
- Consultation should be accessible to all regardless of age, gender, faith, race, disability, as well as knowledge and experience, making it easy for groups and individuals with little or no knowledge of the planning process to get involved.
- Consultation materials will be clear and concise, and avoid jargon wherever possible. The scope of the consultation will be clear from the start, so respondents know what they can comment on and how their comments will be taken into account.
- Whenever possible, feedback will be given to reflect how comments received have been incorporated into the planning process.
- Consultation methods will be used that are appropriate to the stage of the planning process concerned. These will seek to maximise the opportunity for community involvement, while making sure the resources they require are proportionate, and time- and cost-effective.

- Consultation methods will make widespread use of electronic and modern media techniques wherever possible to make consultations easier, quicker and more cost-effective. They will be used alongside traditional methods, including printed media, exhibitions and meetings.
- Written information will be made available in alternative, accessible formats if requested, such as large print, Braille, audio or translated into another language.
- Engagement in the planning process will be encouraged from the earliest stage possible ('front-loaded'), when there is greater opportunity for the views of interested and affected parties to be reflected in decisions made.

2. Community involvement in Planning Policy

2.1 As a local planning authority, MKC has a duty to put in place a framework of planning policies (known as the Development Plan or Local Plan) which can be used to guide development proposals and determine planning applications. The Local Development Scheme¹ sets out the timescales for preparing new planning policy documents which will form part of the Development Plan. As part of the preparation of these planning policies and supporting documents, there are statutory stages of consultation that must be undertaken to allow the public and stakeholders to have their say on what is being proposed.

2.2 This section of the SCI provides an overview regarding the documentation that MKC prepares and the regulations that guide the preparation process for these documents. Embedded within planning regulations are statutory requirements for consultation and this section sets out how MKC will achieve them. In turn, it indicates the methods of consultation and engagement that may be used to ensure everyone has the opportunity to be fully engaged in the process. Other documents related to the plan-making process will be published on the Council's website, but are not normally subject to public consultation. This includes the Local Development Scheme and Annual Monitoring Report, which have to be prepared by MKC and set out the process for monitoring and reviewing a Local Plan or Development Plan Document.

Planning documents subject to consultation

2.3 **Local Plans or Development Plan Documents (DPDs)** – these documents contain the key policies that guide the future development of the Borough and are used in the determination of planning applications. The Council has adopted the following DPDs – Waste DPD (February 2008), Minerals Local Plan (July 2017), Site Allocations Plan (July 2018) and Plan:MK (March 2019). The statutory stages in the preparation process for these, and any future, documents are laid out in the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended)².

¹ <https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/planning-and-building/planning-policy/local-development-scheme-lds>

² <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2012/767/made>

2.4 Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) – these provide additional guidance and interpretation to support policies in the Local Plan/DPDs, or relate to specific sites. As with Local Plans/DPDs, the statutory requirements for preparing SPDs are laid out in the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended).

2.5 Development Frameworks or Briefs – they are prepared to set the parameters that development proposals for a specific site should meet, providing certainty to developers about what is expected in a planning application. There is no statutory process for preparing these documents, unless they are adopted as an SPD, but the principles of consultation and engagement will be integral to the process we follow.

2.6 Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Schedule – CIL is a charge that is levied on new development floorspace which is intended to contribute towards the provision of infrastructure to support growth. The statutory process for preparing a CIL Charging Schedule is set out in the Community Infrastructure Regulations 2010 (as amended)³.

2.7 Neighbourhood Plans or Development Orders – these are community-led documents, prepared by a Town or Parish Council. MKC is committed to supporting the development of neighbourhood plans, and they are an important part of how the local community can be engaged within the planning system. The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012⁴ sets out the statutory requirements for the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans and Development Orders. Consultation during the preparation stage of these plans is undertaken by the Town or Parish Council and does not need to meet the requirements of this SCI. However, it may provide useful guidance for Town and Parish Councils undertaking consultation and engagement on their draft plans.

2.8 An adopted Neighbourhood Plan would comprise part of the development plan for the local area and, as a result, there are a number of legal requirements that the plan must meet. A Neighbourhood Plan must:

³ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2010/948/contents/made>

⁴ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2012/637/contents/made>

- Have appropriate regard to national planning policy (e.g. the NPPF 2019 and national Planning Practice Guidance (PPG));
- Be in general conformity with the strategic policies in the Milton Keynes Development Plan (these are set out in Appendix J of Plan:MK);
- Contribute to the achievement of sustainable development;
- Be compatible with environmental obligations, as incorporated in UK law and policy; and
- Be compatible with human rights requirements.

2.9 Revised Neighbourhood Planning Regulations⁵ came into force on 31 January 2018. These included:

- A requirement to notify neighbourhood planning qualifying bodies of planning applications;
- Increased flexibility to the process for modifying and revising neighbourhood plans; and
- Facilitate the modification of neighbourhood areas.

2.10 The Council has prepared a short briefing note to provide guidance for all local neighbourhood bodies to reflect the new changes in national planning policy. This can be viewed on MKC's neighbourhood planning webpage⁶.

2.11 The table below summarises the key steps and the support MKC will provide in terms of Neighbourhood Planning. Further advice, guidance and support can also be viewed on MKC's neighbourhood planning webpage⁷.

⁵ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2017/1243/contents/made>

⁶ <https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/planning-and-building/planning-policy/neighbourhood-planning>

⁷ <https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/planning-and-building/planning-policy/neighbourhood-planning/advice-guidance-and-support-for-neighbourhood-planning>

Table 2.1 Key stages and guidance on Neighbourhood Planning

Key steps	Details of each stage of the neighbourhood plan process	Milton Keynes Council will provide the following direct advice and support to Parishes
<p>1. Designating the Neighbourhood Area and Forum</p>	<p>Town and Parish Councils would need to apply to have their area designated as a Neighbourhood Area. Where this application covers the whole parish area it must be designated by MKC.</p> <p>In a few cases where there is a Parish Meeting, rather than a Parish or Town Council, a Neighbourhood Forum will have to be established by the local community to act as the qualifying body to prepare a neighbourhood plan.</p> <p>MKC will consult on a Neighbourhood Forum application for a statutory six week period and will then decide, upon reviewing comments from the public, whether the Forum meets the required criteria and whether to designate the Neighbourhood Forum.</p> <p>Both the Neighbourhood Area and Neighbourhood Forum applications can be submitted and consulted upon at the same time.</p>	<p>Initial meeting with Parish Council, presentation and opportunity for questions, 2 hours.</p> <p>Provision of background materials, e.g. maps and plans; links to evidence base and population data, GIS Team time.</p> <p>Arranging consultation on the neighbourhood area application, 2 hours.</p>
<p>(From designation to Pre-submission stage can take up to 18 months)</p>		

<p>2. Preparing a Neighbourhood Plan</p>	<p>Once the neighbourhood plan steering group has been set up by the qualifying body, it will need to identify the aims and objectives for the plan, begin community engagement and start to pull together an evidence base. Once the evidence base is established, the steering group will start to draft policies and proposals for the plan.</p> <p>This process can take on average 18 months to three years as applications for funding, commissioned evidence and analysis can take time to come forward.</p> <p>While preparing a neighbourhood plan, it is important to engage with your community and keep everyone up to date on your progress throughout this period.</p>	<p>Meeting on what is proposed in the Pre-submission document; advice on community engagement; consulting the statutory bodies. Initial advice on any emerging policies, 1/2 day</p>
<p>3. Providing local indicative housing requirement figure</p>	<p>Requirement under the revised NPPF (2019) for all LPAs to provide, if requested do so by the neighbouring planning body.</p>	<p>In the absence of strategic policies in Plan:MK setting out local housing requirement figures, MKC will liaise with the neighbouring planning body to provide an indicative housing figure. It is anticipated this will take approximately 8 hours.</p>

<p>4. Pre-submission consultation on the plan</p>	<p>Once a draft plan is produced it will need to be consulted on for a six week period, this is carried out by the Parish Council or Neighbourhood Forum and must be evidenced in the consultation report submitted to MKC. This consultation will allow you to make any necessary changes that come forward from comments made by the public in advance of submitting the plan for examination.</p>	<p>Meeting on representations made on Pre-submission document; advice on responding to them and preparing Consultation Statement, 2 hours.</p>
<p>(From Pre-submission stage to Submission stage can take up to a year)</p>		
<p>5. Submission of the plan to MKC</p>	<p>Once you have completed your neighbourhood plan and carried out the statutory six week consultation, the plan will be submitted to MKC to publicise and consult on for a further six weeks.</p> <p>Comments received during the publicity period on the submitted Neighbourhood Plan will be published on the relevant Neighbourhood Plan webpage. All responses will be sent to the appointed examiner for his/her consideration.</p>	<p>Publicise and consult on the plan, 2 hours.</p>
<p>6. Independent examination of the plan</p>	<p>MKC will appoint an independent examiner to check the plan meets the basic conditions and standards. The examiner will take into account any formal representations submitted during the</p>	<p>If a public hearing is required, ½ day.</p> <p>Following receipt of the Examiner's report, check that the modified neighbourhood plan has included all of the</p>

	<p>consultation period. It is not expected that a public hearing will take place during the examination unless the examiner feels it necessary to do so.</p> <p>The length of time taken during the examination will depend on the number of policies and the complexity of the plan. On average it takes around six weeks from appointing an examiner to receiving their report.</p> <p>The examiner will recommend that the plan proceed to referendum, requires modifications (to be made by MKC) in advance of a referendum, or to not proceed to referendum.</p>	Examiner's changes, 2 hours.
7. Referendum	<p>We will organise the referendum of any plan deemed to meet the basic conditions. Any person living within the Neighbourhood Area that is registered to vote in local elections will be able to vote on the plan. If more than 50% of the people voting in the referendum support the plan then the plan will be made (adopted).</p>	Arrange referendum
8. Adoption or making of the plan (bringing it into legal force)	<p>Once the plan passes referendum it will become a part of the statutory development plan for Milton Keynes and will be used when determining planning applications in the area.</p>	Arrange adoption

2.12 Once submitted to MKC, we have a responsibility to publish a draft neighbourhood plan for comments before examination and referendum. The Council will publicise the proposed submission plan and conduct a six week public consultation exercise in accordance with regulation 16 of the [Neighbourhood Planning \(General\) and Development Management Procedure \(Amendment\) Regulations 2017](#). All consultation responses will be forwarded to the independent examiner to consider, as part of the examination process.

2.13 Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SA and SEA)

– these document the appraisal process undertaken alongside our Local Plan/DPD preparation (and SPDs in some cases). The process is laid out in Government guidance⁸. Consultation is undertaken alongside the related plan, with the exception of the Scoping Report stage, which is particularly focussed on three ‘consultation bodies’ (Environment Agency, Natural England and Historic England) and is carried out ahead of the preparation of the Local Plan/DPD.

2.14 Local Investment Plan (LIP) - the LIP is the infrastructure delivery schedule that is prepared by MKC and updated regularly to guide investment in key infrastructure and projects across the Borough, helping to ensure development is supported by the facilities needed to make it sustainable. The preparation of the LIP is not governed by statutory regulations, but the process undertaken by MKC will incorporate regular periods of public and stakeholder engagement.

Who will we consult?

2.15 The Regulations listed above for each type of document provide information on the bodies and organisations that must be directly notified as part of the preparation process. Table 2.1 summarises our interpretation of these requirements in terms of the different sorts of documents we will consult on.

2.16 In some cases, we have a degree of discretion over whether to notify certain bodies if the topic of the document in question is not likely to be of interest or relevance to that body. Normally, we would consult wider than might be necessary to

⁸ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7657/practicalguidesea.pdf

ensure everyone has the opportunity to be involved. Further, this list only reflects the bodies that we will contact directly regarding a consultation by email or post. As all consultation material will be more widely available, any interested parties will be able to respond if they wish.

2.17 Our consultation database contains the contact details of around 4,000 organisations, individuals or agents who have responded to a planning policy consultation in the past, or have asked to be kept informed of the preparation of our planning documents. The database of organisations and individuals to be consulted will be kept up-to-date and managed to comply with the General Data Protection Regulations 2016 (GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA). Full details about how we use this data and the rights you have around this can be found on the [Council's website](#)⁹. If you have any data protection queries, please contact the Data Protection Officer at data.protection@milton-keynes.gov.uk.

2.18 The Council also prepares other planning-related documents which will be subject to public consultation and engagement, although we have some discretion over the arrangements for those consultations as they would not be governed by regulations in the same way as those in the table below. These documents could include Conservation Area Reviews or the Local List (which identifies significant local heritage assets).

⁹ <https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/planning-and-building/development-management-privacy-notice-milton-keynes-council>

Table 2.2 Direct notification as part of the consultation on a planning document

	Local Plans/DPDs	SPDs	Dev't F'works / Briefs	CIL Charging Schedule	N'hood Plans	Sustain-ability Appraisal ¹⁰	Local Investment Plan
Specific Consultation Bodies¹¹							
Town and Parish Councils within MK	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
Town and Parish Councils adjacent to MK	A	A	B	A	A	A	A
Adjacent Local Planning Authorities, and other LPAs within the South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership	A	A	B	A	A	A	A
Buckinghamshire and MK Local Nature Partnership ¹²	A	B	B	B	B	A	A
Homes England	A	B	B	A	A	A	A
Natural England	A	B	B	B	A	D	A
Environment Agency	A	B	B	B	A	D	A
Historic England	A	B	B	B	A	D	A
Network Rail Infrastructure Limited	A	C	C	B	B	A	A
Highways England	A	C	C	B	B	A	A
Electronic Communications providers	A	C	B	B	B	A	A
Utility providers	A	C	B	B	B	A	A
NHS Area Team/MK Clinical Commissioning Group	A	C	B	B	B	A	A
General Consultation Bodies¹³							
Voluntary bodies whose activities benefit the area	A	B	C	C	B	A	A

¹⁰ As stated above, with the exception of the Scoping Report stage, consultation on Sustainability Appraisal (incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment) is undertaken alongside the Local Plan or DPD that it relates to.

¹¹ The regulations also include reference to the Coal Authority and the Marine Management Organisation, however consultation with these bodies is not considered necessary in Milton Keynes due to its location.

¹² The National Planning Policy Framework (paragraph 180) requires that we work collaboratively on strategic planning priorities in consultation with Local Nature Partnerships

¹³ General consultation bodies would be notified when the content of the document will be relevant to that body or the group(s) it represents.

	Local Plans/DPDs	SPDs	Dev't F'works / Briefs	CIL Charging Schedule	N'hood Plans	Sustain-ability Appraisal ¹⁰	Local Investment Plan
Bodies representing interests of different racial, ethnic or national groups in the area ¹⁴	A	B	C	C	B	A	A
Bodies representing the interests of different religious groups in the area ¹⁵	A	B	C	C	B	A	A
Bodies representing the interests of disabled persons in the area ¹⁶	A	B	C	C	B	A	A
Bodies representing the interests of businesses in the area	A	B	C	B	B	A	A
Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service	A	B	B	A	B	B	A
Other Consultees							
Ward Members	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
Developers, housebuilders and their agents	A	B	A	A	B	A	A
Other organisations or individuals who are on our consultation database	A	B	C	B	B	A	A

Key	
A	Body will normally be notified
B	Body will be notified if it is considered the document will be relevant to them or the group they represent, or if the document relates to an area near to them.
C	Less likely that the body in question will be notified, but each document will be considered separately, and consultees chosen accordingly
D	'Consultation bodies' that must be consulted at the Scoping Stage. We would normally also consult wider, and notify other bodies in this list where appropriate

¹⁴ In Milton Keynes, the Racial Equality Partnership serves as an umbrella group, representing these bodies

¹⁵ In Milton Keynes, the Council of Faiths serves as an umbrella group, representing these bodies

¹⁶ In Milton Keynes, the Disability Action Group serves as an umbrella group, representing these bodies

How will we consult?

2.19 As a minimum, we will directly notify the bodies and individuals identified in Table 2.1, at the relevant statutory consultation stages for each type of document. Where we have an email address for a consultee we will send the relevant information electronically, to make efficient use of time and resources. When this is not possible, we will send a letter by post.

2.20 In all cases, we encourage consultees to make comments electronically where possible. Our preference is for consultees to submit their response on a 'Representation Form' to ensure we have all the information needed to process the representation. The form can be downloaded online or a paper copy collected from the Council's Civic Offices or any library within the Borough and emailed or posted back to us when complete. When returning a completed response form by email, we ask respondents to send them in a MS Word format, rather than PDF, to enable us to process comments more efficiently.

2.21 We will always make consultation documents available online through our website¹⁷ and include them on the Council's list of current consultations¹⁸. Documents are also made available to view in the Council's Civic Offices in Central Milton Keynes and in libraries across the Borough, so people without the ability to access the internet can still view and respond to our consultation documents.

Additional consultation and engagement methods

2.22 In addition to meeting the standard requirements set out above, the Council will, where appropriate, do additional consultation and engagement at various stages of the document preparation process. A range of consultation methods are set out below which will be used by the Council. Not all methods will be used for every consultation; they will be tailored to the specific stage and be proportionate to the importance of the document in question.

¹⁷ <http://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/planning-and-building/planning-policy>

¹⁸ <http://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/your-council-and-elections/consultations>

- Using the **local media**, preparing **press releases** to circulate to the local newspapers and radio stations, or working with the newspapers to prepare **articles** or advertisements to provide detail and raise awareness and interest. Occasionally, it may be appropriate to use **statutory notices** in the local press (e.g. MK Citizen) which set out the consultation matters (name and subject of the document, dates of the consultation period, where the documentation can be viewed and how to make comments). This is, however, an expensive method as the cost of statutory newspaper notices is high and may not be considered to provide value for money.
- In addition to directly notifying teams that have an interest in the consultation in question, we will also share information across **internal departments** through the weekly bulletin email distributed across the Council, to ensure other teams know about current consultations. Information is also included in the Councillors' News email circulated to all Ward Members and Town and Parish Councils.
- Include articles in the Council's MK Connect **newsletter** circulated to properties across the Borough on a bi-annual basis. We may also provide information to be included in our partners' newsletters, for example, those circulated by Town and Parish Councils and Community Action:MK.
- Use of **social networking** sites and media techniques (e.g. Facebook or Twitter) to raise awareness of consultations.
- Deliver **presentations** or hold Q&A sessions at meetings of existing groups, for example, those that are managed or convened by partners in the voluntary or community sectors. This could include Town and Parish Councils, Residents' Associations and Business Associations, a Developers Forum, local interest groups or community groups.
- Prepare and make available **leaflets** which summarise the key issues being addressed by the document, or to stimulate debate. This would signpost to the main document where people who are interested in the subject can find more information. A **questionnaire** or survey could also form a part of such a leaflet.

Leaflets should be made available to anyone visiting the MKC offices, places in local libraries and other locations with a high turnover of visitors.

- Raising awareness of consultation periods, including advertising consultation events or meetings, or providing information on issues through **posters** and **flyers**. These could be displayed in public places e.g. libraries, Council offices, or on Town and Parish Council information boards.
- Hold **exhibitions** or roadshows, with unmanned displays or staffed drop-in sessions.
- Ensuring we engage with groups that may be harder to reach through traditional methods. This could include attending meetings of the **Youth Cabinet** or working with local schools on specific issues that may of interest to the younger generation. Similarly, working with leaders from **faith communities** and groups that represent older people, for example, will enable us to gather views from the stakeholders that might otherwise not get involved in the planning process.
- Where a consultation relates to a development brief being prepared for a specific site, we may undertake **door-to-door leaflet drops** in the local area to ensure that nearby residents and businesses are aware of the proposals and any specific events being held about it.
- Hold interactive **workshops** or discussion groups with key stakeholders, with the opportunity to explore and debate issues in some depth. Such events may often be led by external facilitators, and could use techniques such as 'Charrette'; 'Lunch Learns'; 'World Cafe' or 'Open Space' formats¹⁹.

When will we consult?

2.23 The regulations relating to each type of planning document set out the points in the preparation process where we must undertake consultation, or make documents available for comment. We will always meet these requirements, but in addition we may undertake additional engagement at appropriate points through the process. In

¹⁹ These methods are used to host and facilitate group discussions and can be used in meetings for large numbers of people who may have very different views.

particular, there should be significant effort made at the early stages of preparing our local plan documents, at the point in the process when there is the greatest opportunity to influence the shape of our strategies and policies.

2.24 The Council's Parishes' Protocol²⁰ states that "*timeframes for consultation should be proportionate and realistic to allow stakeholders sufficient time to provide a considered response*". It suggests that this might typically vary between two and 12 weeks depending on the nature and impact of the proposal. In some cases consulting for 12 weeks will not be feasible. However, the Council will endeavour to give advance warning to Town and Parish Councils and other stakeholders of upcoming consultations so that they can arrange to respond within the consultation period. The regulations that most planning documents must follow generally require a minimum of six weeks for local plans and four weeks for SPDs, so we will always exceed the Council's minimum standard of two weeks.

2.25 Consultations that take place over a holiday period (e.g. Christmas and Easter) will normally be no less than eight weeks in duration, to reflect Town and Parish Council meeting schedules and for the convenience of members of the public who maybe away.

What happens after a consultation has closed?

2.26 All comments received as part of a planning policy consultation will normally be published online. After a consultation period ends, comments will be reviewed and considered by officers and where appropriate, changes to the proposed document will be made by the Council. Where possible, officers will prepare responses for each comment received. However, it is common to receive a large volume of responses to some policy documents and it is not possible to respond to each comment individually. In these cases, comments will be summarised and responses to the issues raised prepared.

2.27 A Consultation Statement will usually be produced which sets out the comments received (either individually or in summarised format, dependent on the volume and

²⁰ <http://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/your-council-and-elections>

complexity), the Council's response to those comments and details of how the outcome of the consultation has been reflected in the next stage of the document preparation process. In some cases, it may be appropriate to identify the specific amendments that have been made to a document in response to comments received, however, this will not always be possible, particularly on complex documents or where a large volume of comments have been received.

2.28 The Council will notify anyone who has responded to a consultation upon the adoption of the document and when the Consultation Statement is made available, so individuals can see how their comments have informed the process.

3. Community Involvement on Planning Applications

3.1 MKC determines around 3,000 planning applications each year. This ranges from householder extensions to major new residential, retail or commercial developments. As part of the process to determine these applications, it is important that the community and other stakeholders have the opportunity to get involved, to help shape the areas where they live, work and spend their leisure time.

3.2 Planning legislation sets out the minimum requirements for publicising and consulting the community and stakeholders on planning applications. This section sets out our interpretation of how we will meet those requirements through the development management process, through consultation at pre-application (which is confidential), application and appeal stages.

Pre-application Stage

3.3 The Council's Customer Services Team provide free advice and basic guidance on planning issues, for example, information on use classes and permitted development rights. For more detailed guidance, pre-application advice from the Development Management Team is available to all applicants. The pre-application advice service allows an applicant (from a homeowner wondering whether an extension is likely to get planning permission, to a major retail developer seeking to redevelop an area in one of our town centres) to explore and address the planning issues raised by their prospective development without incurring the cost of submitting a formal planning application. Information on accessing pre-application advice, the service that will be provided and financial costs involved can be reviewed on the [Council's website](#)²¹.

3.4 The NPPF (paragraphs 39 to 46) highlights the benefits of front-loading consultation and engagement in the development management process. It states that;

“Early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties. Good quality pre-application discussion enables better coordination between public and private resources and improved outcomes for the community. [...] The more issues that can be resolved at pre-application stage, including the need to deliver improvements in infrastructure and affordable housing, the greater the benefits.”

²¹ <https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/planning-and-building/premium-planning-service/pre-application-advice-for-planning>

3.5 For small-scale development proposals, there is usually less requirement or need for an applicant to undertake pre-application consultation. However, for larger-scale or potentially controversial development proposals, the Council encourages developers to engage with relevant stakeholders, including the local community, Ward Members, and Town and Parish Councils at the earliest opportunity. For very large development proposals, pre-application consultation is required by the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended by the Localism Act 2011)²². For pre-applications relating to smaller scale applications that do not fall within the criteria for public consultation, as above, the Council will not notify members of the public or external consultees of the proposals.

3.6 The Council provides initial guidance for applicants and developers undertaking pre-application consultation, as well as information regarding Planning Performance Agreements, on [its website](#)²³.

Planning Application Stage

3.7 Once a planning application has been received and validated by the Technical Support Team, there is a process of publicity and consultation for most application types (exempt applications include certificate of lawfulness). This is undertaken to ensure that stakeholders and the community have the opportunity to have their say on the proposed development. The following procedures will be undertaken:

- On householder planning applications, removal/variation of condition applications for previously approved householder planning applications and prior-notification applications for a householder extension, **neighbour notification letters** are sent to the occupiers of the properties adjoining the site.
- When it is not possible to identify all adjoining properties, a **site notice** is displayed as close as possible to the proposed development site.

²² <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/20/part/6/chapter/4>

²³ <https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/planning-and-building/premium-planning-service/pre-application-advice-for-planning>

- For some types of application (including major applications; applications for works to listed buildings; applications for developments that would affect the setting of a listed building or conservation area; or applications for works to trees that are the subject of a Tree Preservation Order or are within a conservation area), either a **site notice** will be displayed or a combination of a **site notice and a newspaper advert placed in the local press**.
- An email will be sent to the relevant **Ward Members and Town or Parish Council(s)** to notify them of the proposed development.
- Consultations will be sent to the relevant **adjoining Town or Parish Council(s) and adjacent Local Planning Authorities** where strategic development sites border their respective administrative area.
- A **weekly list** of all planning applications is circulated via email to all Ward Members, Town and Parish Councils and other interested parties. Individuals and organisations should email dcadmin@milton-keynes.gov.uk if they wish to be added to the distribution list.
- **Internal and external statutory consultees** are also notified of relevant applications (for example Highways, Development Plans, Planning Obligations, Environmental Health, Ecology, Conservation and Archaeology, or the Environment Agency, Internal Drainage Board or Natural England).
- Following these notifications, there is a period of **28 days** (for Ward Members and Parish/Town Councils) and **21 days** (for other consultees [for example, the Environment Agency, internal consultees, Canal & River Trust] and neighbours) on all applications for any interested parties, including internal and external statutory consultees, to make comments. We continue to accept comments until the application is determined, so in many cases this will be longer than 21 days.
- If significant changes or significantly **amended plans** are submitted while the application is being processed, the Council will re-consult and an additional 14 day period will be available to make comments. The same parties will be notified of these changes, in addition to anyone who has already commented on the proposals.

- All planning applications can be viewed online through the Council's [Public Access system](#)²⁴. Alternatively, interested parties can view an e-copy of a planning application by coming into the Council's Civic Offices. Following this, if an interested party wishes to obtain a hard copy, they can do so. Please note there is a fee for this service and the current charge is 30 pence per A4 sheet and 50 pence per A3 sheet, regardless of whether it is a black and white or colour copy.
- We encourage consultees, consulted neighbours and third parties to **respond online** through the Public Access system. This allows us to process comments more efficiently. Alternatively, comments can be submitted by **email or post**. We encourage all comments to be made in writing and include the author's name and address.
- All comments received are **public documents** and will be made available to view online through the Public Access system. They cannot be kept confidential, although personal information (signatures, email addresses and phone numbers) is censored.
- Under the [officer scheme of delegation](#)²⁵, the majority of applications do not get determined at **Development Control Committee** (DCC, which is usually reserved for major applications), or at or at Development Control Panel (DCP, which is a smaller meeting with fewer Members).
- For those applications that are determined at DCC or DCP, these are public meetings and members of the public have the **right to speak** in relation to an application. All requests to speak must be registered with Democratic Services (by email to dc-speaking-requests@milton-keynes.gov.uk) by noon two clear working days prior to the day of the meeting. For example, if the meeting is scheduled to be held on a Thursday, speaking requests are required to be submitted by noon on Monday. A maximum of three members of the public (including representatives of local organisations other than Parish/Town Councils) can speak on any

²⁴ <https://publicaccess2.milton-keynes.gov.uk/online-applications/>

²⁵ <https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/planning-and-building/planning-apply-pay-view/view-and-comment-on-planning-applications>

application, with a maximum of three minutes of speaking time each. These spaces are allocated on a first come, first served basis.

- Once a decision is issued, the **decision notice** is placed on the Council's website, and upon request we will write to or email anyone who commented on the application to confirm the decision.
- Further information regarding how Planning Officers deal with planning applications and the customer service standards that the Planning Service sets for itself can be found within the Planning Customer Charter, published on the [Council's website](#)²⁶.

Appeal Stage

3.8 An appeal may be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate by an applicant where:

- Permission has been refused;
- Permission has been granted with conditions which the applicant considers to be unreasonable, or;
- The application has not been determined within the appropriate time limit.

3.9 If an appeal is made, the Council will notify anyone who was notified about the original application, and anyone who commented on the application. Any further comments made at this time should be sent straight to the Planning Inspectorate (not the Council) for their consideration.

3.10 For appeals that are decided through an informal hearing or public inquiry, interested parties are also given the opportunity to appear before the Inspector. The Planning Inspectorate will consider the evidence and decide whether the Council's decision was correct, the appeal will then be either allowed or dismissed. The Inspector's decision is binding on the Council, although it can be challenged on a point of law in the High Court.

²⁶ <https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/planning-and-building/planning-apply-pay-view/view-and-comment-on-planning-applications>

3.11 All appeal decisions will be published on the application case file on the Council's [Public Access website](#).

4. Review of the Statement of Community Involvement

4.1 Once adopted, the SCI is intended to last for at least five years before a review of the document is required by the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended). The need to review the document within the five year period will be assessed on an annual basis to ensure it remains up-to-date and is appropriate in light of changing factors such as new legislation and regulations, changing corporate policy, changing customer expectations, reductions in staffing and new developments in technology. If it is considered that any changes are needed to the SCI, this will be done through a formal amendment process which will then be incorporated into the SCI. This will ensure the document remains appropriate and effective in involving the community in both the preparation of planning policy documents and the determination of planning applications.

Annex A Planning Policy Consultations during COVID-19

On 13 May 2020, in response to the challenges placed on Local Planning Authorities due to social distancing restrictions put in place to tackle COVID-19, the Government issued²⁷ updated planning guidance. This urged local planning authorities to review and revise SCIs to allow greater flexibility in light of effects of social distancing restrictions, principally the closure of libraries and other public buildings.

When carrying out statutory planning policy consultations during the periods of social distancing restrictions, MKC will seek to make available hard copies of consultation documents at Civic, and where possible at other public buildings such as libraries. This may include viewing documents in Civic by appointment only. For neighbourhood plans, the Council will work with parish councils to make arrangements for hard copies of submission plan documents to be viewed by those unable to access them online. However, where this isn't possible MKC will publish consultation materials on its website in electronic format only.

During periods affected by social distancing restrictions, MKC will also explore consultation and engagement methods using online digital communication tools, such as video conferencing, online surveys, and online presentations. Such tools will be used in place of face to face meetings and events where it is considered that the gathering of people would be contrary to Government guidelines on social distancing. Where the use of such tools is not possible or feasible, MKC will consider whether to progress an emerging planning policy document to a statutory consultation stage without early engagement or whether progress on the document is paused to enable such engagement to take place.

The above guidance should be read alongside the rest of the SCI. Where the above guidance conflicts with or introduces uncertainty when read alongside other guidance in the SCI, then the above guidance takes precedence during periods of relevant social distancing restrictions.

²⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/plan-making#covid19>