

Consultation Statement for Hertsmere's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This consultation statement outlines the process undertaken by Hertsmere Borough Council (HBC) to engage the community in the preparation of the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) (2025). The SCI is a statutory document which sets out how the Council will involve residents, businesses, and other stakeholders in planning decisions. This consultation was conducted in accordance with the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and the Localism Act 2011.

2. Consultation Objectives

- 2.1 The objectives of the consultation were to:
- Support transparency and inclusivity in the planning process.
 - Engage a broad cross-section of the community.
 - Gather feedback on preferred methods of engagement.
 - Reflect evolving digital and accessibility needs.

3. Consultation Process

- 3.1 The consultation on the draft Statement of Community Involvement was carried out between 16 June and 28 July 2025. This consultation saw a higher than anticipated level of engagement for a document of this nature, with 1,185 responses across all channels. A variety of consultation methods were used to engage with communities across the HBC area which are set out below:

a. Zen City Consultation Platform

- 3.2 An interactive digital engagement tool was used to gather feedback from residents and stakeholders. This platform had 718 registrations, with 457 or 64% of these that included at least one response to the survey questions asked and 147, or 21% completed surveys. It is not unusual for respondents to only answer the questions that they feel apply to their interests or concerns. 115 participants (16%) registered on the system but did not complete a survey response.

- 3.3 Over 90% of respondents when asked confirmed that they were residents within the HBC area. The platform enabled users to respond to targeted questions and provide open comments. Data analytics from Zen City helped identify key themes and sentiment trends from all of the submitted responses, these themes are set out in Section 5, below.

b. Hard Copies at Deposit Points

- 3.4 Printed copies of the draft SCI were made available at deposit points across the borough during their opening hours including:
- Local libraries
 - Civic offices
 - Parish and town council offices
- 3.5 The key advertised deposit locations are listed below:
- Civic Offices, Elstree Way, Borehamwood, WD6 1WA
 - 96 Shenley Road, Borehamwood, WD6 1EB
 - Elstree and Borehamwood Town Council, Brook Close, Borehamwood, WD6 5BT
 - Borehamwood Community Hub, 5 Leeming Road, Borehamwood, WD6 4EB
 - Oakmere library, High Street, Potters Bar, EN6 5BZ
 - Wyllyotts Centre, Wyllyotts Close, Potters Bar, EN6 2HN
 - South Mimms Village Hall, Blanche Lane, South Mimms, EN6 3PD
 - Aldenham Parish Council, The Radlett Centre, 1 Aldham Avenue, Radlett, WD7 8HL
 - Bushey Library, Sparrows Herne, Bushey, WD23 1FA
 - Bushey Museum, Rudolph Road, Bushey, WD23 3HW

This ensured access for individuals without internet access or those preferring physical documents.

c. Dedicated Web Page

- 3.6 A consultation page was hosted on the HBC website, providing:
- Background information on the SCI
 - A downloadable version of the draft document
 - Links to the Zen City platform
 - Details on how to submit feedback through other methods

d. Email Feedback Option

- 3.7 Stakeholders were invited to submit comments directly via the planning policy email address. This provided a flexible and direct channel for more

detailed or formal responses and HBC received 467 responses through this channel of communication. A larger proportion of these responses used a standardised template prepared by Save Hertsmere. As with Zen City the data received from these responses contributed to the identification of key themes and sentiment trends.

e. Social Media

- 3.8 The Council's e-mail alerts and social media channels were used to inform subscribers about the consultation and how to provide comments.

f. Hardcopy Responses

- 3.9 No paper responses were received to the consultation.
- 3.10 **Appendix 1** includes a copy of June consultation draft of the SCI.

4. Who Was Consulted

- 4.1 This consultation was aimed at all different communities and residents with the HBC area, work was undertaken across council teams, with Corporate Communications and Partnerships to identify ways of communicating with all local stakeholders, including under-represented groups.
- 4.2 A range of channels were used to engage with people including email alerts and social media posts to publicise the consultation to the following:
- General public
 - Local residents and community groups
 - Parish and town councils
 - Developers and planning agents
 - Statutory consultees (e.g. Environment Agency, Historic England)
- 4.3 There was a proposal for an online meeting for members of the public to ask questions of officers using Teams software. However, the passing of a member of the Council, meant that an unforeseen election took place during the period of the consultation, with the pre-election period starting after this consultation had started, and it was therefore not appropriate to hold an online meeting during a period of political sensitivity.
- 4.4 In total we received 1,185 responses across the different methods of communication.
- 4.5 **Appendix 2** includes a list of statutory consultees consulted.

5. Summary of Responses

- 5.1 The consultation generated some strong responses from residents and community groups, highlighting both specific feedback on the SCI document and broader concerns about the planning system in Hertsmere. While some issues raised fall outside the scope of the SCI, they reflect important community sentiments and align with wider work being undertaken across the Council.

Broader Planning Concerns

- 5.2 Several respondents raised issues not directly related to the SCI but indicative of wider planning concerns, including:
- Clarification around the protection of Green Belt and emerging concepts such as Grey Belt.
 - Engagement in developments under permitted development rights, including Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs), and calls for greater transparency across all pre-application discussions.
 - Concerns around development that can affect communities outside of borough's boundary, such as development taking place close to or on the authority boundary. The Council has a legal responsibility (under the Localism Act 2011) to work constructively with neighbouring authorities and prescribed bodies under 'Duty to Cooperate' (DtC). This duty requires LPAs to consider planning issues which extend beyond its own administrative boundary. The Council will carry out its Duty to Cooperate responsibility and document process through an action plan approach and supporting material including the production of a statement of common ground. Appendix 2 includes Duty to Cooperate organisations as defined by the statute and regulations.
 - Infrastructure and Community Impact: Concerns were raised about overdevelopment, traffic congestion, pressure on schools and GP services, environmental degradation, and loss of Green Belt. While these issues are outside the scope of the SCI, they reflect significant community concerns about the wider planning process, which is being addressed through work taking place across HBC.
- 5.3 Although these matters cannot be addressed within the SCI itself, they underscore the need for continued dialogue and cross-departmental collaboration to respond to community concerns raised through the consultation.

Key Themes Relevant to the SCI

- **Transparency and Trust:** A recurring theme was the need to build trust in the planning process. A theme that has emerged is respondents being unaware of existing transparency measures, such as recorded meetings, and expressing a desire for greater openness. Enhancing the SCI to better communicate these mechanisms could help address these concerns.
- **Early and Inclusive Engagement:** Respondents emphasised the importance of engaging communities from the outset - not just during formal consultation stages. There were strong calls to reach under-represented groups, including younger and elderly residents, renters, disabled people, and those without internet access. Suggestions included:
 - Hosting face-to-face events in accessible venues.
 - Providing materials in plain English and translated formats.
- **Communication Channels:** There was widespread support for a multi-channel approach to communication, including email alerts, social media updates, and printed materials in accessible locations. Respondents also requested postcode-based subscription options and broader geographic notification areas. Some of these features may require technological development.
- **Access to Planning Applications:** The planning portal was described as difficult to navigate, particularly for non-experts. However, as the portal is a nationally implemented system, these changes fall outside the scope of the SCI, whilst the portal cannot be changed the Council can provide further support such as user guides and sign posting for residents. Many respondents felt unsure about how to comment on applications or what constitutes a valid objection, clearer definitions within the Glossary of the SCI creates an opportunity to further support understanding of the planning system. There may also be a need to enhance existing website information.
- **Neighbourhood Planning:** Neighbourhood planning emerged as a priority, with calls to respect existing Neighbourhood Plans—especially in areas like Shenley—and to support communities in developing or updating their own plans. The SCI sets out HBC's role in Neighbourhood Planning and the authority's duty to support, and has been updated to provide more clarity.
- **Document Accessibility and Clarity:** Respondents consistently called for the SCI to be clearer and easier to understand with requests for the use of plain English throughout and the avoidance

of overly technical language or jargon. There were also requests for an expanded glossary with less technical language.

- 5.4 The strong level of engagement with this type of consultation—particularly in response to questions about understanding and involvement in the planning system —demonstrates a clear desire among residents to participate meaningfully in planning. The feedback however, also revealed a level of distrust and a lack of awareness about existing engagement methods.
- 5.5 **Appendix 3** includes a full list of redacted responses.

6. How Feedback Was Considered

- 6.1 This is a summary of changes to the draft SCI using feedback from consultation responses, these amendments aim to support improved transparency, accessibility, engagement, and representation in planning processes.

Relevant to All Themes

- A review of the whole document to reflect the requests for the use of plain English to ensure the document is accessible and easy to understand, rather than the use of jargon and technical language.
- There were concerns around the risk of losing detail with a shorter document, however there are very clear areas that an SCI should cover, and these are included within a shorter document but are more accessible as it is more visually appealing and easier to understand when written in a format that can be read and understood by a wider group of people.
- Following this review, text on all pages has been updated to reflect this feedback and this is set out in the marked-up version of the SCI in **Appendix 4** to this Consultation Statement, with other changes not related to the plain English review set out in track changes.

Document Content

- The introduction has been amended to include an expanded summary that clarifies the purpose of the SCI. On page 10 reference to the South West Hertfordshire Joint Strategic Plan (JSP) has been replaced with reference to the South West Hertfordshire Spatial Development Strategy (SDS), reflecting the changes government have set out in the Devolution White

Paper (December 2024) and the Planning and Infrastructure Bill (April 2025).

- The explanation of Neighbourhood Planning on page 16 has been reviewed to providing greater clarity around the process and its weighting within the wider planning context and the impact Neighbourhood Plans have on decision making.
- Page 17 that focuses on the South-West Hertfordshire Joint Strategic Plan has been removed, the context has changed and this is now out of date.
- Additional information on the requirements in relation to the Duty to Cooperate.

Development Management

- Expanded text on page 19 to include a clearer explanation of the pre-application process, the need for comments to relate to material planning considerations to be considered effectively, the process around who can take part in committee meetings, how they can register to speak for or against an application and rules around this, information on requesting a call-in and inclusion of a link to HBC's Planning Committee page.
- On page 20 there is a reference to a period of 21 days for re-consultation on material changes, this has been amended to say up to 21 days, as 21 days is not always required or necessary in such situations.
- Pages 21 and 22 amended to ensure there is sufficient clarity in the wording and layout of these pages.

Glossary

- The inclusion of a Glossary in the consultation draft was seen as a positive addition by many respondents, with requests for it to be expanded, therefore the following additions have been made:
 - Article 4 Direction
 - Affordable housing
 - Appeals process
 - Call-in
 - Local Plan
 - Material consideration
 - Permitted development
 - Section 106 agreement
 - Stakeholders – definitions of key stakeholders including Parish Councils and their roles in the process
 - Statutory consultee
 - Stop notice

- Decision making groups such as planning committee, cabinet and full council
 - Where appropriate examples of practical applications of glossary terms have been added to definitions.
 - On page 26 the Joint Strategic Plan has been removed and replaced with a definition of the emerging Spatial Development Strategy (SDS).
- 6.2 The above changes reflect the consultation responses and the suggested changes that are within the scope of the SCI. Where comments were made that were beyond the scope of the document, they have been noted but are ineligible for inclusion within the revised SCI document.
- 6.3 Clear requests for improvements such as the tone of the document, how it reads and better explanations mean that the revised document will better meet community needs, as it will be easier for stakeholders to use as a practical document to support them in navigating and understanding the planning process.

7. Next Steps

- 7.1 Following the closing of the SCI consultation on 28th July 2025, the responses have been analysed and a set of changes to the document identified, as set out above in this report. Following the production of an updated SCI document, this will be reviewed and go through the process of adoption. The finalised document will be considered by HBC Cabinet at their meeting on 12th November 2025 and full Council at their meeting on 26th November 2025. Following adoption by HBC there is a six week period where a legal challenge can be made to the document.
- 7.2 There is a statutory requirement on Local Planning Authorities to review their SCI every five years. In the meantime, ongoing monitoring and evaluation of consultation and engagement in all areas of planning, from policy to planning applications will measure how the document is performing post adoption.
- 7.3 There are many opportunities for the community to continue to be involved and engaged with the planning process in the HBC area. These include the upcoming review of the Local Plan, ongoing planning applications and Neighbourhood Plans.

8. Appendices

Appendix 1 – SCI Consultation Draft June 2025

Appendix 2 - List of statutory bodies consulted
Appendix 3 – Full list of redacted responses
Appendix 4 – SCI Marked Up with Changes