



Bracknell Forest Council

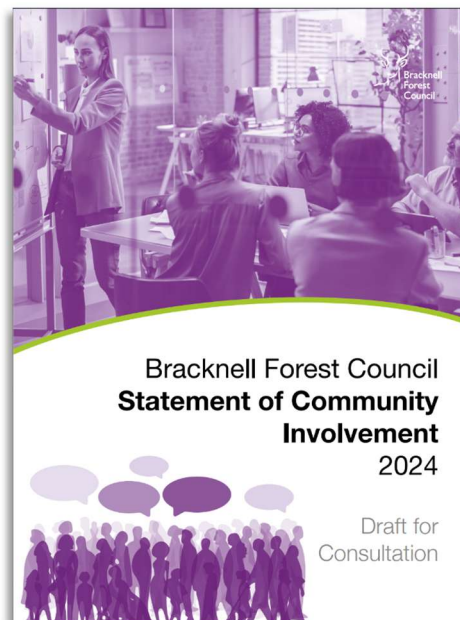
**Statement of Community
Involvement 2025**

Consultation Statement

(April 2025)

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Government requires us to review our Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) every five years to keep it up-to-date and ensure it is working effectively. There is no legal requirement to consult on a review of an SCI. However, we decided it was important that people have a say on how we engage and consult on planning matters. The Draft SCI 2024 was consulted on for five weeks between 29th October and 3rd December 2024.
- 1.2 Although we are not required to produce a consultation statement¹, we feel it is important to set out:
- who was consulted,
 - a summary of the main issues raised,
 - how those issues have been addressed in the SCI.
- 1.2 This Statement relates to the consultation on the Draft SCI 2024.

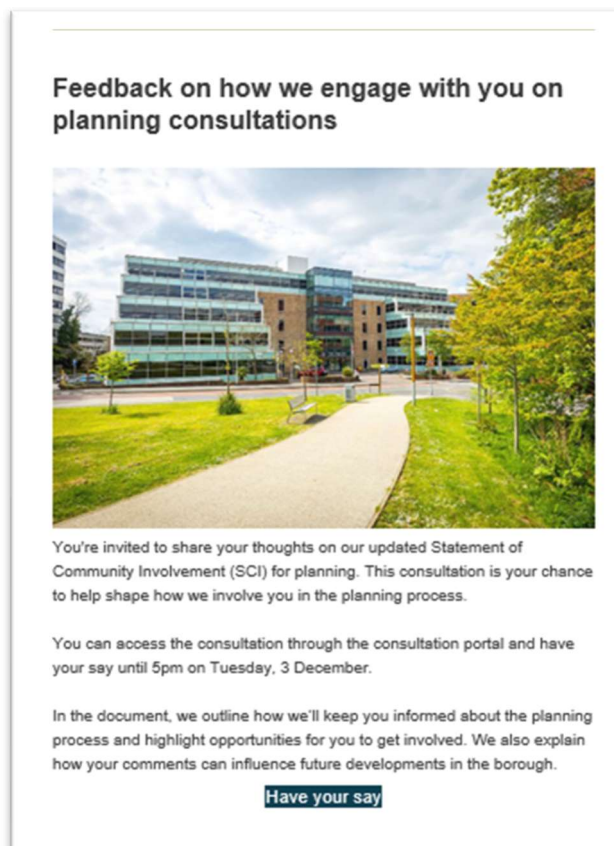


- 1.3 The role of the SCI is to set out how our planning services keep you informed and when there are opportunities in the planning process for you to be involved in planning matters in the future. It provides brief guidance on:
- how the planning system works,
 - how you can participate in planning decisions, and
 - what you can expect if you choose to get involved.
- 1.4 The purpose of the consultation was to seek the views of those living and working in the Borough. We sought views on anything that people felt may help us improve the document overall.

¹ In the interests of best practice, we have followed the requirements of Regulation 12 of 'The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended)' for supplementary planning documents (SPD). This requires Local Authorities to prepare a statement prior to the adoption of a SPD. Whilst this SCI is not an SPD, it is considered important to be transparent about how comments have been considered.

1.5 To engage widely we used several publicity methods. These involved:

- the creation of a 'Statement of Community Involvement' webpage on the Council's website
- the publication of the consultation documents on the Council's planning consultation portal
- sending emails (or letters to those without an email address) to those on the Council's planning policy consultation database which included:
 - Local residents
 - Developers
 - Adjoining local authorities
 - Parish/Town Councils
 - Statutory consultees
- targeted email consultations (at the start and part way through the consultation) to other Council departments who work alongside planning
- the provision of a hard copy of the draft SCI during the consultation period at libraries and Parish/Town Councils within the Bracknell Forest Council area
- a press release at the start of the consultation on the Council's webpage
- putting information on the Council's facebook page on 29th Oct 2024 and 12th Nov 2024.
- an item in the 8th November 2024 'Town and Country extra' (an electronic Borough newsletter). (See image below).



- 1.6 Ten individuals/organisations responded to the consultation. **Appendix 1** provides a summary of the main issues raised and how we have addressed them in the final version of the SCI.

Appendix 1: Summary of main issues raised and the Council's response to them

Representer	Main issue	Council's response
Statutory consultees (4 responses)		
National Highways Surrey County Council Waverley Borough Council	No comments on SCI.	No change required.
Historic England	Support general aims and approach, and reference to Historic England where appropriate.	Noted. No change required.
	Page 12 - combine sentences into one "For example, Historic England are usually only consulted on applications that may impact on the most significant of heritage assets or their settings. Although heritage advice would be sought from specialists in relation to other proposals."	Whilst it is appreciated these comments are linked, long sentences are harder to read and a barrier to keeping the document accessible. No change required.
	Page 18 – add a bullet to the row on plan preparation "Engage informally with statutory consultees on key issues". Typically, informal dialogue yields the best outcomes in plan-making.	It is agreed that this would provide extra clarity on the process already undertaken. Proposed change: Add a bullet to the 'Preparation' row in the table on page 18, under the first bullet which reads: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Engage informally with statutory consultees on relevant key issues.</u>
	Welcome notification on neighbourhood planning areas as well as consultation on draft plans.	Noted. No change required.
Parish/ Town Councils (1 response)		
Bracknell Town Council	Section 1.1 (purpose) - document effectively highlights importance of community engagement. Suggest including examples of where community feedback has influenced decisions to	The SCI provides a framework for how engagement and consultation will be undertaken on planning matters. Planning decisions take into account a range of factors. It is not considered that listing examples would improve the document.

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	demonstrate tangible impact and encourage further participation.	No change required.
	Section 3.15 (Pre-application advice) – clarify how confidentiality has benefitted communities and improved development proposals.	As pre-application advice is confidential, it encourages engagement early in the process for both householders and developers. Confidentiality is key to this happening. Para. 3.15 makes it clear that some proposals can be speculative or commercially sensitive. No change required.
	Sections 4.1-4.6 (notification and communication) - reliance on letters, emails and social media practical, but more detail needed on ensuring these notifications reach diverse groups (e.g., elderly residents or non-native English speakers). Suggest introducing a plan for monitoring/ evaluating communication channel effectiveness.	The weekly lists issued by the Planning Service can be found online, and accessed from home, or at libraries/ the Council offices at Time Square for those without internet. This is set out in the 'Where information is available' section after paragraph 4.5 in the SCI. Notification of planning applications is based on those who geographically, are most likely to be impacted by proposals, rather than by targeting specific groups. In the past, effort has been made during consultations, to collect diversity monitoring data. However, it has been provided in an inconsistent way by respondents and is therefore of limited benefit. No change required.
	Section 14.2 (consultation period) – standard 21-day consultation period may be insufficient for contentious applications, particularly during holidays. Flexibility in consultation periods could improve fairness.	The Council follows the timeframes set in Development Management Procedure Order (DMPO) ² . Extending consultation periods may result in applications not being determined in the statutory period set by the Government, and lead to costly appeals. No change required.
	Sections 9.1-9.8 (Neighbourhood Plans) - provide greater clarity on how residents are encouraged to	It is not for BFC to dictate how Neighbourhood Planning consultations are undertaken, or how residents should be

² The DMPO can be viewed online: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/595/article/15>

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	participate, e.g. workshops, public meetings, awareness campaigns.	<p>encouraged to engage with the Neighbourhood Planning process.</p> <p>Paragraph 9.4 sets out that we encourage Parish/Town Councils to follow the general principles set out in the SCI.</p> <p>No change required.</p>
	Enforcement - lack of adherence to approved planning permissions by certain developers. Example cited of adding extra bedrooms. Not only breach of planning regulations but long-term risk for homeowners in the future. Negative impact on community often follows e.g. parking. Undermines integrity of planning process.	<p>Confidence in the planning system is important. The onus is on the landowner or developer to make sure that all the necessary consents are in place before work starts, and that all the conditions are complied with. It is at the Council's discretion whether action will be taken if a breach is found. Any action taken must be proportionate to the harm caused by the breach. See the Council's Local Enforcement Plan: https://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2021-08/local-enforcement-plan-july-2021.pdf</p> <p>Breaches of planning permission should be reported to the Council for investigation.</p> <p>No change required.</p>
	Section 5.15 & 14.14 (extraordinary events) – post-pandemic adaptations noted, but specifying permanent changes such as hybrid consultations would highlight modern approaches.	<p>Whilst improvements and changes in practice have occurred since COVID, the legislation has not caught up. For example, although committee members can join in discussions remotely, they are unable to vote if they have joined online.</p> <p>No change required.</p>
	Query on how SCI will ensure alignment with evolving national policies, particularly regarding housing and sustainability.	<p>The SCI provides an overview of how we will consult and engage on different planning matters. It is not concerned with detailed planning policies. The SCI will be reviewed in 5 years time, or if there is a significant change in approach as set out in paragraph 1.8.</p> <p>No change required.</p>
	General observation (digital engagement) – more detail on effectiveness (success	<p>In the past, we have tried to collect data to enable this type of monitoring to take place,</p>

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	metrics or case studies) would strengthen section (2.3).	but it is inconsistently provided by respondents and therefore of limited benefit. No change required.
	General observation (inclusivity and accessibility) – specific actions or success stories for engaging non-digital audiences/ underrepresented groups would demonstrate commitment to inclusivity.	The SCI provides a framework for how engagement and consultation will be undertaken on planning matters. Planning decisions take into account a range of factors. It is not considered that listing examples would improve the document. No change required.
	Query on what mechanisms exist for residents to follow up if they feel their input has been overlooked in planning decisions.	As set out in paragraph 3.1 of the SCI, planning officers consider a wide range of matters before determining planning applications. There is no third party right of appeal if a resident objects to a decision that has been made (see paragraph 3.18 of the SCI). The Council's normal complaints procedure can be used for matters not related to the decision itself. No change required.
Other organisations (1 response)		
Berkshire Gardens Trust	Request that the Gardens Trust be added to the list of statutory consultees and the Berkshire Gardens Trust to the list of other consultation bodies in Appendix 1. Work on the protection and conservation of registered sites (listed by Historic England) and non-designated local historic parks and gardens.	Appendix 1 lists the 'specific consultation bodies' as per the Town and Country Planning Act Regulations 2012. The Gardens Trust is not listed, but the Council is happy to add this body to the 'examples of other consultation bodies' in the appendix. Proposed change: Add to Appendix 1 under 'Examples of other consultation bodies': <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>Gardens Trust (including Berkshire Gardens Trust which covers Bracknell Forest)</u>
Residents (4 responses)		
Resident 1	4.2 BFC do a good job of allowing residents to view	Noted. The National Planning Policy Framework contains a presumption in favour

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	<p>applications online, accepting public comments and allowing objectors to speak at planning meetings. But planning process skewed in favour of developers. Housing targets pressure result in 'assumption to approve'.</p>	<p>of sustainable development. A formula published by Central Government must be used to determine how many homes a Local Planning Authority needs to build each year. As set out in paragraph 3.6 of the SCI, a number of matters are considered which guide whether applications are approved or refused.</p> <p>No change required.</p>
	<p>3.16 Pre-application process is biased. Allows developers but not residents to have early confidential discussions with Council.</p>	<p>Early engagement with the Council is beneficial for applicants. Some proposals are speculative or commercially sensitive, so it is necessary for the process to be confidential. Consequently, this means residents do not have the opportunity to comment at this stage. However, as explained in paragraph 3.15 and 3.16 of the SCI, the pre-application process does not pre-empt the decision-making process when a formal application is made. Residents can comment on proposals at this stage.</p> <p>Residents can also make use of our pre-application service for their own development proposals.</p> <p>No change required.</p>
	<p>3.18 Lack of appeal process for objectors is unfair.</p>	<p>As is set out in the SCI in paragraph 3.18, there is no third party right of appeal. This is set in planning law and is not a local matter.</p> <p>A change is proposed to the SCI to make the information on the appeals process clearer (see Council response below).</p>
	<p>3.21 Enforcement breaches – should be routine checks of all developments to ensure no breaches rather than “when brought to our attention”.</p>	<p>Confidence in the planning system is important. The onus is on the landowner or developer to make sure that all the necessary consents are in place before work starts, and that all conditions are complied with. It is at the Council's discretion whether action will be taken if a breach is found. Any action taken must be proportionate to the harm caused by the breach. See the Councils Local Enforcement Plan: https://www.bracknell-</p>

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		forest.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2021-08/local-enforcement-plan-july-2021.pdf Breaches of planning permission should be reported to the Council for investigation. No change required.
	4.2 Expert technical advice on planning applications typically large, intentionally very complex consultant reports paid for by developer. Thus not impartial. Should be sponsored by the Council to ensure independence. Officers do not have time/ resources to properly assess reports provided.	Expert advice includes that of in-house experts and statutory bodies – neither are paid for by developers. These experts can also assess reports provided with large applications. If developers provide complex reports that cannot be assessed in-house, the Council may use external specialists to review them. This can be at the developers' expense. No change required.
	5.10 Parish Council views seem to be routinely ignored.	Disagree. As set out in paragraph 3.1 of the SCI, a number of factors are taken into account when determining development proposals. These include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the development plan • national policy • comments received during the consultation • expert advice, and • any other material considerations. As explained in paragraph 5.2 of the SCI, a section of both the officer and committee report include a response to Parish/Town Council comments. Parish Councils are notified of validated planning applications weekly, as set out in paragraph 4.2 of the SCI. No change required.
	5.12 Developer consultations with the public often limited and questionnaires heavily biased towards capturing positive responses.	Developer engagement can vary and is sometimes not as we would hope. This is why the SCI sets out the Council's expectations in paragraphs 5.12 – 5.14. No change required.
	Plan-making section: BFC do a good job on developing	Noted. No change required.

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	plans and notifying/consulting on them with residents.	
Resident 2	3.1.4 (Petitions) – should be made clear petitions only count as one objection as may be better for objectors to submit separate objections. Both in SCI and on website.	<p>Whilst petitions are logged as one representer, the issues raised themselves are still considered in the same way as if multiple respondents were making the same point. Officer/ committee reports summarise and then consider the main issues raised, whether made by one respondent or many.</p> <p>Both a petition and separate objections indicate the strength of feeling about a proposal.</p> <p>No change required.</p>
	3.18 (no third party right of appeal) – not strictly true. Possible to ask Planning Court for a judicial review. Should reference both in SCI and on website.	<p>Instances of decisions being challenged on legal grounds are rare. This process does not consider the planning merits of a case like an appeal against a refusal would. It only considers whether a legal mistake was made. It is a costly process for both the appellant and the Council. Independent legal advice would need to be sought. A change is proposed to the SCI to make this clear.</p> <p>Proposed change:</p> <p>Add footnote to the third sentence in paragraph 3.18 which reads:</p> <p><u>“In rare instances decisions can be challenged on legal grounds. Legal advice should be sought.”</u></p>
	13.3 (Town and country magazine) – use of ‘magazine’ suggests printed document. Newsletter may be more accurate.	<p>Agree that the use of ‘magazine’ is an incorrect term. The annual hard copy publication of Town and Country (will be Your Bracknell Forest) is a newspaper, and there are also Town and Country ‘extra’ newsletters emailed.</p> <p>Proposed change:</p> <p>Amend bullet under Publicity on Page 29 to read:</p>

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		<p>"Press releases/ notices in the media (such as Town and Country magazine <u>Your Bracknell Forest newspaper/ newsletters</u>")"</p>
	Title of document gives no indication it relates to planning. Can this be changed/ improved.	<p>The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires local planning authorities to "prepare a statement of community involvement". Since this is a specific term, it cannot be changed. However it is considered it could be clarified by stating that it relates to planning matters on the front cover.</p> <p>Proposed change:</p> <p>Amend the front cover to read:</p> <p>"Bracknell Forest Council Statement of Community Involvement 2024 Draft for Consultation <u>2025 in planning matters</u>"</p>
	Previous SCI Appendix 10 provided a useful diagrammatic representation of householder notification. Can something similar be included.	<p>Diagrammatic representations are not as useful as they may seem, since each site and proposal is different. As decisions about notification are left to the discretion of the case officer and differ from site to site (for example we may notify more widely than just neighbouring properties), it would not be helpful to have this information in the SCI.</p> <p>No change required.</p>
Resident 3	5.3 Could public comments be anonymised instead of removed once decision made on application. Would improve transparency since comments are very important and relevant to the application. GDPR does not specify specific time limits for different types of data.	<p>No, comments cannot be anonymised. GDPR means personal details cannot remain on our website once the application has been determined. However, the issues raised by contributors are listed in the officer/ committee reports. Whilst no names are associated, the key issues remain available to view.</p> <p>Should anyone wish to view an application form or the associated comments, this can be arranged on request. The relevant documents can be made publicly available on the BFC Public Planning Register for a specified temporary period.</p>

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		<p>Change proposed:</p> <p>Add a footnote to the first sentence of paragraph 5.3:</p> <p><u>"They can be viewed on request."</u></p>
	Thanks for reviewing [the SCI].	Noted. No change required.
Resident 4	<p>All documents whatever their purpose should be provided in Summary, Easy Read and different languages to be as inclusive as possible.</p> <p>Not appropriate for a reader to suggest changes.</p>	<p>We do not routinely translate every document for various reasons. It would be a hugely time consuming and costly process to produce multiple versions of all Council documents in different formats and languages. Some would require external input at a cost to the Council.</p> <p>Proposed change:</p> <p>Amend text on page 29 under 'Where information is available' to read:</p> <p>"Contact us if documents are required in an alternative format, such as large print, <u>EasyRead</u> or another language. <u>We may ask for some extra information from you before deciding if we can fulfil your request.</u>"</p>