

# 3.0 Our methods for community engagement in planning policy

## What is planning policy?

- 3.1 Planning policy involves preparing plans or requirements to provide a vision that will guide decisions about new development in an area. In England, planning policy is delivered through the creation of a development plan which provides a framework for addressing housing needs and other economic, social, and environmental priorities. Planning applications have to be determined in accordance with the development plan unless there are material considerations that indicate otherwise.
- 3.2 The development plan for an area is typically made up of a number of documents, including a local plan, neighbourhood plans, waste and mineral plans and area action plans. There is also a policies map. There are other planning policy documents which help to guide decisions about new development, but which are not part of the development plan, such as supplementary planning documents (SPDs).

## Why should communities help to create planning policies?

- 3.3 The Councils believe it is vital that you can contribute to planning policies in order to help to create the vision which will shape your area. We are therefore committed to providing opportunities for comment, feedback and engagement when preparing different planning policy documents. Including different perspectives from our communities means that the quality and effectiveness of the planning documents will improve. Below, the different types of planning policy documents are explained and there is also guidance about how communities can influence each document.

## Local Plans

- 3.4 A Local Plan is a plan for the future development of the local area, drawn up by the local planning authority in consultation with the community. The Local Plan contains policies relating to the amount of development that should take place, the number of jobs and homes that need to be created, where development should take place, and how it should be designed. The Local Plan also identifies the infrastructure that needs to accompany development, setting policy requirements of developers, for example the provision of affordable housing. Policies can apply to the whole area, or they can be specific to individual sites.
- 3.5 In 2018, Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council adopted their Local Plans. Both [Cambridge City Council](#) and [South Cambridgeshire District Council](#) also have a number of documents which contribute to their wider development plan. You can find more information on what documents form part of our current development plan on GCPS's [website](#).
- 3.6 The Councils are currently preparing a joint Local Plan to cover the areas of Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire. When adopted this will replace the adopted Local Plans of the individual Councils.
- 3.7 The [First Proposals consultation](#) on our emerging Local Plan sets out the vision to make Greater Cambridge a place where a big decrease in our climate impacts comes with a big increase in the quality of everyday life for all our communities. The Plan aims to create thriving neighbourhoods with the variety of jobs and homes we need, increase nature, wildlife and green spaces,

and safeguard our unique heritage and landscapes.

- 3.8 We are also preparing a North East Cambridge Area Action Plan, which would also have the status of a local plan but cover the specific area around Cambridge North Railway Station and Cambridge Science Park.
- 3.9 A timetable for preparing and reviewing our Local Plan documents is set out in the [Local Development Scheme](#) (LDS). This is regularly updated and explains the stage that the emerging Greater Cambridge Local Plan and North East Cambridge Area Action Plan has reached and how people can comment on the Plan's policies.

### Supplementary planning documents

- 3.10 Local plans can be supported by supplementary planning documents (SPDs). These documents provide guidance to support the implementation of planning policies and can include documents such as design codes for specific sites. The key difference for SPDs compared to local plans is that they do not undergo public examination by a Planning Inspector and are not automatically subject to a sustainability appraisal. SPDs are capable of being a material consideration which means they should be taken into account in decisions but are not part of the development plan.
- 3.11 It should be noted that where documents are being produced by an individual Council rather than jointly, the measures in this SCI will be applied by the individual Council. An example might be if a design code is produced to supplement one of the current adopted individual Council Local Plans.

### Neighbourhood plans

- 3.12 Neighbourhood plans are a tool that local communities use to shape development in the places they live and work. Once adopted or 'made', neighbourhood plans become part of the development plan which means they become a material consideration when planning applications

are decided. With neighbourhood plans, the community carries out the work, such as researching maps, conducting surveys, and drafting policies. This is often conducted by a parish Council, or if it is an unparished area, a neighbourhood forum needs to be established which then acts as the qualifying body to prepare the neighbourhood plan.

- 3.13 Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council both have a duty to support communities who are preparing neighbourhood plans. This support could include advising on potential plan policies, supplying maps, or helping to set up a forum. We have also prepared a [Neighbourhood Planning Toolkit](#).
- 3.14 By August 2023, there were eight 'made' neighbourhood plans in Greater Cambridge with 15 further areas formally designated indicating their intention to prepare a neighbourhood plan. You can find details of neighbourhood plans being prepared by parish Councils and neighbourhood forums and their current status on our [website](#).
- 3.15 Both Councils can also assist communities with the preparation and delivery of neighbourhood development orders (NDOs) which grant planning permission for buildings specific sites or for alterations across areas.
- 3.16 Once a neighbourhood plan is prepared and has undergone an independent examination and a successful referendum it falls to the Local Planning Authority to 'adopt' as a made plan. The Council that covers the area(s) of the neighbourhood plan can consider whether it should be adopted, for example a plan within South Cambridgeshire would be the responsibility of SCDC, and a plan in Cambridge City would be for CCC.

## How will the Local Planning Authorities consult on Local Plan documents?

3.17 Each Local Planning Authority must fulfil a number of public consultations, in line with national government regulations shown in Table 1. However, we want to reflect the aims of this SCI and aspire to go beyond the Government’s expectations for public engagement. For example, as part of the First Consultations for the emerging Local Plan, Planning Officers engaged with members of the public at pop-up events, met with groups who are traditionally under represented in planning consultations, and held webinars online to increase outreach. GCSP also tried to make our online consultations accessible by avoiding the use of planning jargon. GCSP will continue to consider innovative ways of carrying out public engagement for the next stages of the Local Plan.

3.18 Local Planning Authorities provide you with the opportunity to have your say on planning policy and aim to provide an efficient, transparent, proportionate, inclusive, accessible, accountable, and coherent approach to consultation.

3.19 In preparing a local plan document, Local Planning Authorities will engage with relevant stakeholders and gather evidence. For each consultation, Planning Officers will review each submitted comment, evaluate it against evidence, and consider whether the policy needs to be altered. Planning Officers will then prepare a consultation statement setting out how engagement has been undertaken, explaining how GCSP has considered the issues and how the feedback has been incorporated.

3.20 As part of the Examination process there could be further consultations, for example the main modifications to the Plan. Any additional consultations will be for six weeks unless it falls over a public holiday period where it may be extended.

3.21 The statutory process for preparing these documents is set out in the [Town and Country Planning Local Planning England Regulations \(2012\)](#) (as amended). There are two key stages of consultation during local plan preparation, Regulation 18 and Regulation 19 set out in Table 1.

**Table 1: Local Plan preparation**

Local Plan stage	Consultation duration
<b>Public participation (Regulation 18)</b>	One or more public consultations, on issues and options or draft policies. Consultations will be undertaken for a minimum of a six week period. All representations must be received within the consultation period.
<b>Pre-submission publication (Regulation 19)</b>	Consultation will be undertaken for a minimum of a six week period. All representations must be received within the consultation period.

3.22 There are four main methods for consulting at Regulation 18 and Regulation 19 stages that the Councils will apply. These are:

- Inviting representations through a notice on the Councils websites, and advertising through other methods such as social media, news releases, Council publications or press adverts
- Consultations with specific consultation bodies and appropriate general consultation bodies and other relevant stakeholders (see Appendix 2)
- Consultation documents will be available to view on the Councils websites, and at our Council offices (see Appendix 3 for details)
- Public consultation events if appropriate to the nature of the consultation (this may include in person and/or online events).

3.23 Following the consultation stages, the Council submits the Local Plan to the Secretary of State together with the representations received at the Regulation 19 stage. The submitted document and the representations received, will be considered

by a Planning Inspector at an independent examination. The Council will notify the specific and general consultation bodies who were invited to make representations at earlier stages, and all those who have requested to be notified, of this stage.

3.24 Individuals and organisations that have made representations may be invited by the Inspector to submit a written statement during the examination. Individuals and organisations that made an objection to the document and have requested to speak at the examination will be contacted by the Inspector to be informed of the procedure for being heard.

3.25 Following the receipt of the Inspector's Report the Councils will notify all those who have requested to be notified, as soon as it is reasonably practicable. The report will also be made available on the Councils website and at Council offices defined in Appendix 3.

3.26 If the Inspector has concluded that the Plan is sound the Council will adopt the plan and will publish an adoption statement on their website and make it available to view at Council offices as defined in Appendix 3. The Council will then again contact all those who have requested to be notified as soon as it is reasonably practical.

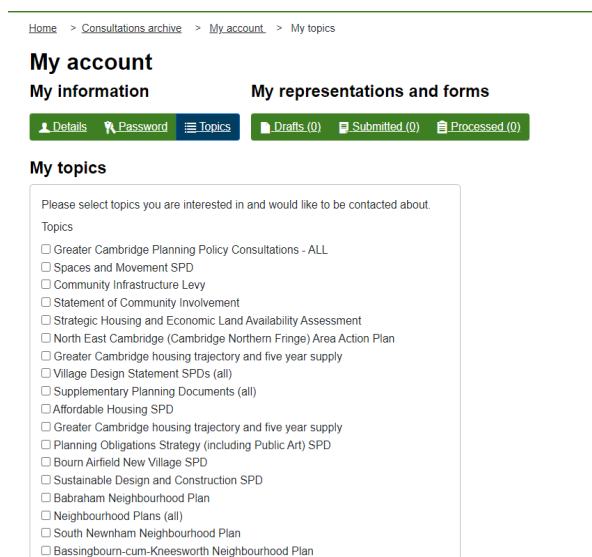
## Who do Local Planning Authorities involve in Plan-making?

3.27 Regulations specify a number of organisations that Local Planning Authorities must consult when preparing planning policy documents. These bodies are set out in Appendix 2. They include specific consultation bodies and various types of general consultation bodies. Specific consultation bodies include utility companies, government agencies, Local Planning Authorities and parish Councils. General consultation bodies are voluntary bodies active in the area and those bodies which represent different interests and include neighbourhood forums.

3.28 The Council is required to co-operate with neighbouring Local Planning Authorities and other prescribed bodies on strategic matters that cross administrative boundaries under the statutory 'duty to co-operate'. The Councils are committed to cooperating with the [Local Nature Partnership](#) (LNP) (Natural Cambridgeshire) and have regard to their activities which are relevant to local plan making. The LNP acts as an independent voice for the natural environment in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough and part of its role is to coordinate partners to deliver projects and activity that will meet the Partnership's vision and aims. The bodies identified under the statutory duty to co-operate are defined in Appendix 2.

3.29 Individuals and organisations can opt-in to receive notifications in relation to future public consultations. To opt-in, users must register onto the GCSP consultation database. Once logged into the [consultation database](#), the 'My Information' tab allows the user to choose the 'Topics' to receive future mailings about. These can be updated by the registered user as preferred. If you make comments on a planning policy document, we will also offer you the opportunity to opt-in to these updates, which will keep you informed about future stages of the plan making process. Figure 1 below shows the layout of the webpage with a preview of the list of topics to receive mailings about.

**Figure 1: Consultation database screen**



## How can I learn about future policy changes if I cannot access the internet

- 3.30 We recognise that not everyone can access the internet, or who might struggle navigating online consultations. During consultations for significant new policy documents such as the emerging Local Plan, we will often undertake in person engagement activities to try and engage people who might otherwise be excluded from digital communications.
- 3.31 If you do not have an email address or do not have access to the internet but would like to opt-in to receiving future mailings in relation to public consultations or notifications on one or more of our planning policy documents, please contact us by telephone or write to us using the details in Appendix 3.

## How can representations be submitted?

- 3.32 During the consultation periods our preferred method is to receive comments through our website. This helps us process your comments efficiently. Representations can also be sent to us by email using the address in Appendix 3. The online consultation system allows any individual,

business, organisation, or group to register their details and submit comments during consultation periods.

- 3.33 We recognise that not all people have access to the internet, so we also accept representations submitted to the postal address listed in Appendix 3.

Representations received, including names of who they were submitted by, will be published on the Councils websites. You can view the latest versions of our privacy notice on our website.

- 3.34 If you are having difficulty commenting, or need information in a different format, please email us at [localplan@greatercambridgeplanning.org](mailto:localplan@greatercambridgeplanning.org), call us on 01954 713694.

- 3.35 The privacy notice for planning policy consultations and notifications sets out how your personal data will be used and by whom, if you opt-in to any of our 'topics' or submit representations. The consultation database will be maintained by the Local Planning Authorities and will follow the latest legal requirements on data protection, currently the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) 2018.

- 3.36 The Councils will not accept or publish comments that contravene its compliance with the Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010.

## How will GCSP include a wider range of perspectives?

- 3.37 GCSP will meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, which aims to promote equality, eliminate discrimination and encourage good relations between different groups associated with age, disability, gender and gender reassignment, race, religion and other protected characteristics. It is recognised that some parts of the community in the area are under represented such as Gypsy and Traveller communities, the young and elderly, and it is important to include them in planning

consultations. The Councils will work closely with relevant organisations that have experience in finding the best way to engage with these groups.

3.38 It is GCSP's aim to explore how innovative forms of public engagement can be further developed and refined in future consultations. In 2022 South Cambridgeshire District Council established the 'Young People Task & Finish Group' to explore how to improve youth engagement in South Cambridgeshire. A [report](#) set out the opportunities to create or develop effective youth engagement along with recommendations relating to the SCI that GCSP will use to improve planning consultation with young people.

3.39 The Councils want to ensure local communities are well informed about planning matters within the Greater Cambridge area. To achieve this, the Councils will continue to promote the use of electronic methods of consultation including our website and social media to make involvement easier, quicker and more cost effective. The Councils are keen to explore new methods of communication and engagement with local communities, recognising that e-communications can be a highly effective way of publicising information about the planning service to the widest possible number of people and organisations.

3.40 GCSP aims to include a wide range of perspectives within the Plan-making process and will continue to explore different measures to improve levels of participation. Examples of where GCSP has tried to widen participation include:

- Creating accessible documents that meet the requirements set out in our [GCSP accessibility statement](#)
- Used social media and videos to publicise consultations
- Created bespoke consultation websites to support engagement
- Held events at a wide range of venues and locations, for example providing drop in events, attending established events like coffee mornings, or

providing information at railway stations

- Held interactive webinars to discuss consultation issues and responded to questions, and used interactive tools to allow attendees to participate
- Engaged directly with groups who are under-represented in planning consultations, such as sixth-form students, and Gypsy and Travellers communities.

## Preparation of supplementary planning documents

3.41 SPDs can be prepared to add greater detail and guidance to planning policies or allocations. A SPD cannot create new or amend planning policy. SPDs could relate to an area or they may be topic-based, such as affordable housing or design guidance.

3.42 Prior to the formal stage of consultation, Local Planning Authorities will engage with relevant stakeholders and gather evidence. They will prepare a consultation statement setting out how this has been done, and how issues that have been raised have been considered in finalising the SPD.

3.43 The Local Planning Authorities will consider all comments that are made at formal consultation stage and make any appropriate changes to the SPD before it is adopted. Upon adoption the SPD will be published together with an adoption statement, made available to view on the Councils website, and at the Council's main offices (see Appendix 3). Local Planning Authorities will also send a copy of the adoption statement to all those who requested to be notified.

3.44 The statutory process for preparing these documents is set out in the Town and Country Planning Local Planning England Regulations (2012) (as amended). There is one public consultation stage during SPD preparation, Regulation 12 and Regulation 13 that should be consulted on for a minimum of four weeks.

- 3.45 There are four methods for consulting at Regulation 12 and Regulation 13 stages that will be followed. These are:
- Inviting representations through a notice on the Councils websites, and advertising through other methods such as social media, news releases, Council publications or press adverts
  - Consultations with specific consultation bodies and appropriate general consultation bodies and other relevant stakeholders (see Appendix 2)
  - Consultation documents will be available to view on the Councils websites, and at our Council offices (see Appendix 3)
  - Public consultation events if appropriate to the nature of the consultation (this may include in person and / or online events).

### Preparation of neighbourhood plans

- 3.46 The statutory process for preparing these documents is set out in the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012 and subsequent amendments. Table 2 below sets out the key stages of consultation during neighbourhood plan preparations that are undertaken by the Local Planning Authorities. More information regarding the neighbourhood planning process can be found on our website and Section 5 of this document sets out how Local Planning Authorities will assist parish Councils and neighbourhood forums during the NP process.

**Table 2: Neighbourhood Plan Preparation**

Neighbourhood plan stage	Consultation duration
Regulation 5, 6 and 7 Neighbourhood Area Designation: The qualifying body applies to the Local Planning Authority for a neighbourhood area to be designated.	No consultation is required where the whole of a parish is proposed. A minimum period of 6 weeks consultation for all other proposed neighbourhood plan areas
Regulation 9, 10 and 11: Designation of a neighbourhood forum	Not less than 6 weeks from the date on which the application is first publicised
Regulation 15 and 16 Submission: Where a draft NP is submitted to the Local Planning Authority and the plan meets the requirements in the legislation, the Local Planning Authority must publicise the NP.	Minimum of 6 weeks
Regulation 18 Independent Examination: Post receipt of the Examiners Report the local planning authority may decide to make a decision which differs from that recommended by the examiner. If this is the case the local planning authority must carry out a targeted consultation inviting representations.	Within 6 weeks of the local planning authority first inviting representations

- 3.47 The main methods for consulting on neighbourhood plans at the Regulation 5, 6 and 7, 9, 10 and 11 stages that must be followed are:
- Inviting representations through a notice on the Councils websites, and advertising through other methods such as social media, news releases, Council publications or press adverts
  - Consultations with specific consultation bodies and appropriate general consultation bodies and other relevant stakeholders (see Appendix 2)
  - The relevant qualifying body will be asked to assist the Local Planning Authority in publicising the consultation by placing information about it in any local newsletters or on their website
  - If requested by the relevant qualifying body the Local Planning Authority will also notify local contacts in the proposed neighbourhood area. The contact details of these local groups to be provided by the qualifying body
  - Posters prepared by the Council to be shown at key locations in the neighbourhood plan area during the particular stages: creation of a forum, designation of area, and consultation on submission
  - Consultation documents will be available to view on the Council's websites, and at the relevant Council offices (see Appendix 3), additionally at the qualifying body's office or publicly accessible venue within the neighbourhood area during normal office hours.

- 3.48 The main methods for consulting on neighbourhood plans at the Regulation 15 and 16 stages that must be followed are:
- Inviting representations through a notice on the Councils websites, and advertising through other methods such as social media, news releases, Council publications or press adverts
  - Notify any consultation body referred to in the consultation statement submitted alongside the draft neighbourhood plan. These bodies are referred to in [Paragraph 1 of Schedule 1 in the Neighbourhood Planning \(General\)](#)

[Regulations 2012](#). The qualifying body will have considered which of these to notify depending on whose interests the qualifying body considers may be affected by proposals in the draft neighbourhood plan

- Emails to anyone that has 'opted-in' to be notified of consultations on the specific document being prepared
  - Consultation documents will be available to view on the Councils websites, and at the relevant Council offices (see Appendix 3), additionally at the qualifying body's office or publicly accessible venue within the neighbourhood area during normal office hours.
- 3.49 The main methods for consulting on neighbourhood plans at the Regulation 18 stage that must be followed are:
- Emails sent by the Local Planning Authority inviting representations from
    - o the qualifying body
    - o anyone whose representation was submitted to the examiner and any consultation body that was previously consulted.

