

South Somerset District Council

Statement of Community Involvement



December 2015



Foreword

I am pleased to present our new Statement of Community Involvement (SCI).

Planning is an important consideration in many aspects of our lives, from the protection of our historic landscape and features, to the location of the homes we live in and the places we work.

South Somerset District Council has a history of successful engagement with its local communities and is committed to building on its reputation for successful community involvement. This document sets out how the Council plans to engage with and involve the community in plan-making and the preparation of policies, as well as helping to decide on planning applications.

I hope that you will take the opportunity to help to shape your communities by getting involved in the planning process.

Cllr Angie Singleton
Portfolio Holder Strategic Planning (Place Making)

Contents

	Page
1 Introduction	1
2 Plan Making	4
3 Planning Applications	18
4 Resources Available for Community Involvement	26
5 Monitoring and Mechanisms for Review	27
Appendices	
Appendix 1: Consultation Bodies	28
Appendix 2: Methods of engagement for development plan documents and supplementary planning documents	32
Appendix 3: Acronyms	38

If you need this document in large print, Braille, audio or another language, please contact the Spatial Policy Team at The Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil, BA20 2HT.

If you have hearing difficulties and have access to a Textphone call: (01935) 462440

1. Introduction

- 1.1 As required by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) South Somerset District Council has produced this Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)¹. The SCI sets out how and when the community and other stakeholders will be consulted on the preparation of the Council's statutory planning documents. It also explains how the community will be consulted on planning applications. The previous SCI was adopted in 2007 and requires updating due to changes in planning legislation and regulations.
- 1.2 The Localism Act (2011) updated the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) and introduces a number of changes to the planning system, including the introduction of Neighbourhood Plans. Alongside this there have also been changes to The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 which mean that the Council's SCI no longer needs to be examined.
- 1.3 The Government has also introduced the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which was adopted in March 2012². This has since been supported by the publication of the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) in March 2014³. The NPPF sets out national planning policy and must be taken into account when preparing local planning policy, and in determining planning applications. The NPPF, along with the NPPG, aim to simplify the basis from which to make planning decisions and have replaced the majority of previous Planning Policy Statements and Planning Policy Guidance Notes.
- 1.4 In respect of community involvement the NPPF states that in preparing Local Plans:
"Early and meaningful engagement and collaboration with neighbours, local organisations and businesses is essential. A wide section of the community should be proactively engaged, so that Local Plans, as far as possible, reflect a collective vision and a set of agreed priorities for the sustainable development of the area..." (Paragraph 155).
- 1.5 The Localism Act (2011) has introduced many changes to the planning system, including the revocation of regional strategies and the introduction of Neighbourhood Plans. Therefore the Council must ensure that the adopted local development documents⁴ conform to legislation and latest government policy. This may involve a full review of an existing document or a partial review such as of a specific policy or topic. It will also involve the production of new documents such as a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) charging schedule.

¹ Requirement for a Statement of Community Involvement is set out in Section 18 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) (as amended):

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/5/section/18>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>

³ <http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/>

⁴ Local development documents include Local Plans, Development Plan Documents and Supplementary Planning Documents

- 1.6 South Somerset District Council is committed to high quality engagement with its residents, businesses, local councils and other organisations operating within the district. The benefits of engaging with a wide range of people and organisations in the planning process within South Somerset include:
- Greater public ownership of planning decisions;
 - Informing the Council of public priorities;
 - Providing opportunities for the Council and others to work collaboratively; and
 - Compliance with statutory regulations.
- 1.7 The Council has a good track record of communicating and working with the community to shape the future of South Somerset. The Council uses its own South Somerset Corporate Equalities Steering Group to ensure all documents are released in an easy to understand format.
- 1.8 In addition, the Council's structure includes four Area Development Teams who are integrated with the local community allowing their views to be more easily incorporated into the Council's work; and for Council's information to be shared more readily. Most officers in the Area Development Teams are trained community facilitators. This SCI continues these efforts and looks to build upon the Council's best practice.
- 1.9 One of the key objectives of the SCI is to encourage continuous community involvement in the planning process and to provide opportunities for involvement and participation for those who wish to be involved in planning matters. It is hoped that through the methods and processes outlined in this document you will have a clear understanding of how you can be involved and be encouraged to take an active part in planning matters. The Council is keen to build on its reputation for actively engaging with the community and by setting out its approach in relation to planning. In this document it makes it clear to all the level of engagement that can be expected.
- 1.10 By engaging in the planning process you will be able to help shape your environment, make a positive contribution for the future and help to ensure that the Council is aware of local issues. By getting involved in the process at an early stage problems and aspirations can be highlighted and addressed.
- 1.11 This document sets out how the Council plans to engage with and involve the community in plan-making and the preparation of policies, as well as helping to decide on planning applications.

Contact Details

- 1.12 The Council's planning teams can be contacted in writing, via email, by telephone, or through the Council's website:

	Write or visit	Council Offices Brympton Way Yeovil BA20 2HT
	Email	Spatial Policy Team: planningpolicy@southsomerset.gov.uk Development Management Team: planning@southsomerset.gov.uk
	Telephone	01935 462462
	Online via the website	www.southsomerset.gov.uk

2. Plan Making

- 2.1 The Council is responsible for the production of planning documents for South Somerset. These can include:
- A Local Plan and Proposals Map;
 - Development Plan Documents (DPD);
 - Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD); and
 - Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).
- 2.2 The timetable for preparing these documents is detailed in the South Somerset Local Development Scheme (LDS). The LDS sets out a programme and resourcing plan for the various documents to be prepared and finalised. It also identifies inter-dependencies, risks and contingencies associated with their delivery. The LDS can be viewed on the South Somerset District Council website: www.southsomerset.gov.uk. Progress of the LDS is reviewed as part of the Authority's Monitoring Reports (AMRs) and changes may be made as a result.

Local Plan

- 2.3 Following the introduction of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) Regulations 2012, Councils are generally expected to include all their planning policies within the Local Plan, however the law does still allow for the production of other planning policy documents such as DPDs or SPDs. The South Somerset Local Plan (2006 – 2028) was adopted in March 2015. The process of producing any planning policy document should fully involve everyone who has an interest in the document.

Development Plan Documents

- 2.4 Any development plan documents will be produced following the same process as a Local Plan and will often focus on a particular area such as a town centre or topic such as site allocations.

Supplementary Planning Documents

- 2.5 Supplementary planning documents (SPD) add further detail to policies in the local plan / DPD and can be used to provide further guidance for development on specific sites or on particular issues such as design. SPDs are not considered by an independent inspector.

Sustainability Appraisal

- 2.6 An on-going part of producing a local plan or DPD is Sustainability Appraisal (SA). This is a mechanism for checking the social, environmental and economic effects of a document and must be carried out for every local plan / DPD. The SA will be subject to public consultation as it develops, and the Council will seek the views of the three statutory authorities associated with the SA scoping stage, namely: the Environment Agency, Heritage England,

and Natural England. At other stages in the process the SA is consulted upon widely along with the relevant local plan or DPD.

Duty to Co-operate

- 2.7 There is now a 'duty to co-operate' in the plan making process. The NPPF says that public bodies (known as 'Prescribed Bodies' - see Appendix 1) have a duty to co-operate on planning issues that cross administrative boundaries, particularly those which relate to strategic priorities (e.g. housing provision). Local planning authorities are expected to demonstrate through evidence that they have effectively co-operated in planning for these issues.

What are the Stages for Preparing a Local Plan or Development Plan Document?

- 2.8 The consultation requirements for a local plan or DPD are set out within the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012⁵. These regulations are summarised below. To understand the full legal requirements please refer to the published regulations. An illustration of the process is shown in Figure 1.

Regulation 18 (Preparation of a local plan) requires consultation with:

- Various "specific consultation bodies" (essentially statutory national and local organisations that are affected by the subject matter of the local plan (see Appendix 1).
- Any of the "general consultation bodies" (essentially anybody interested in the social, economic or environmental development of the district) considered appropriate (see Appendix 1).
- Residents of or other bodies who carry out business in the district; and;
- The Council must make all relevant documents available, including a 'statement of the representations procedure'. Documents must be made available for inspection at the Council's principal office and elsewhere as appropriate (e.g. local area offices and public libraries) and on the Council's website.
- The Council must take into account any representations received.

Regulation 20 (representations relating to a local plan) involves a six week consultation process.

Regulation 22 (Submission of documents and information to the Secretary of State) requires the Council to submit to the Secretary of State all associated documents including the sustainability appraisal report, submission policies map and a comprehensive statement on the consultation that has taken place, including copies of the representations received. The Council must then make these documents and the local plan available for public inspection, give specific notification to the people who made

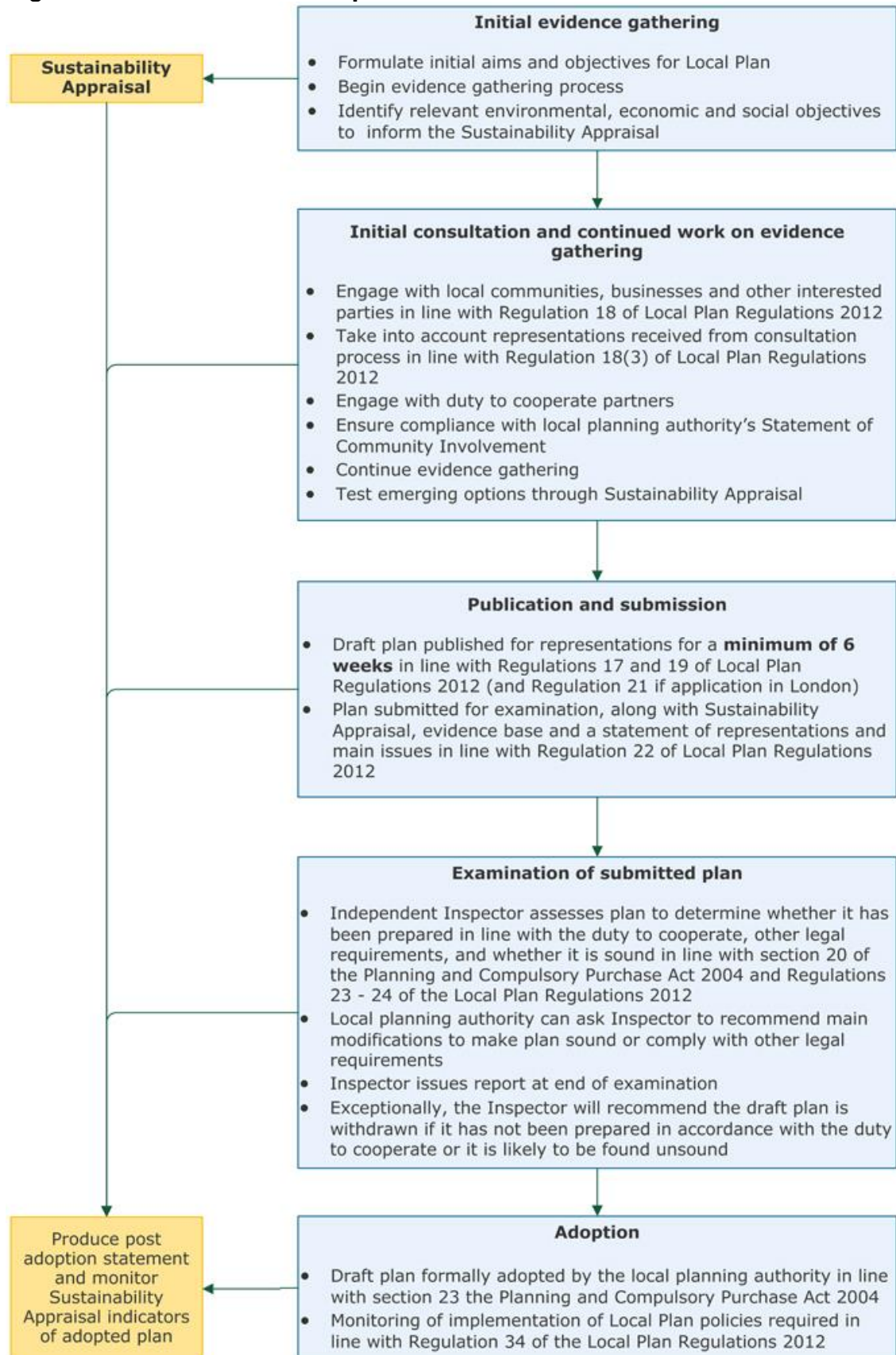
⁵ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2012/767/contents/made>

representations and to anyone else who has requested to be notified at this stage.

Regulation 23 (consideration of representations by appointed person) requires that any representations on the submitted local plan received in the six-week period must be considered by the Inspector who carries out the examination.

Regulation 35 (Availability of documents: general) requires that during consultation periods documents should be made available for inspection at the Council's principal office and any other places within the area the Local Planning Authority (LPA) consider appropriate during normal office hours,. Documents should also be published on the Council's website.

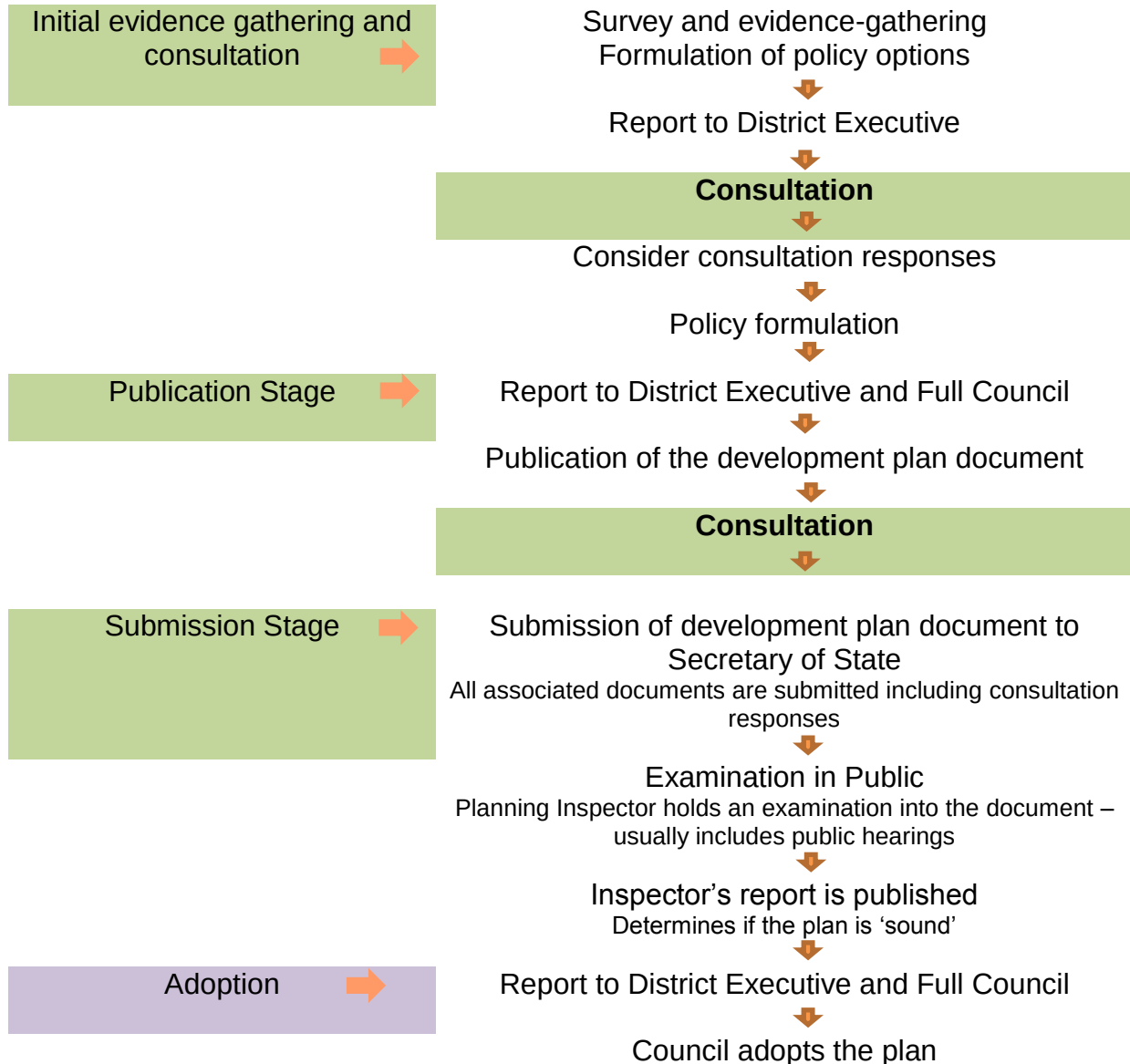
Figure 1: Local Plan / Development Plan Document Process



Source: National Planning Policy Guidance, CLG, 2014, Paragraph 005, Reference ID 12-005-20140306

- 2.9 Figure 2 further simplifies the process set out in Figure 1 and indicates the stages when the document will be considered by District Councillors at Committee.

Figure 2: Local Plan / Development Plan Document Process Simplified



How will I be consulted?

- 2.10 Table 1 shows who will be consulted and the types of engagement methods to be used at each stage in the production of a local plan / DPD. The most suitable and effective consultation methods for the stage in the production of each document will be used. The most suitable methods to be used will be defined at the time in light of the prevailing circumstances. Appendix 2 provides an explanation of the methods of engagement that might be used when a document is being produced.

Table 1: Local Plan / Development Plan Documents Production and Involvement

Production stage	Who will be involved?	Methods of involvement
1. Initial evidence gathering The information needed for the local plan / DPD is prepared and potential issues identified.	The Council will engage with a wide range of individuals or bodies as required including: • South Somerset District Council officers • District Councillors • Relevant town and parish Councils, consultants, developers, local employers and other local groups as relevant • Duty to co-operate 'prescribed bodies' as appropriate	Engagement will involve some or all of the following: • Workshops • Letters • Email • Telephone • Meetings
2. Initial consultation and continued work on evidence gathering (Regulation 18) The information gathered at the first stage is taken into account in the drafting of detailed policies and allocations. Depending on the level of complexity, the draft local plan / DPD stage may involve more than one period of consultation.	• Various 'specific consultation bodies' essentially statutory national and local organisations that are affected by the subject matter of the document (see Appendix 1) • Any of the 'general consultation bodies' (essentially anybody interested in the social, economic or environmental development of the district) considered appropriate (see Appendix 1). • Duty to co-operate 'prescribed bodies' as appropriate • Any other person, organisation or interest group who wishes to engage	The main way the Council will seek to engage will be via the online consultation software (iNovem). Documents will also be made available for inspection at the Council's principal office and elsewhere as appropriate (e.g. local area offices and public libraries) and on the Council's website (Regulation 35). Methods of involvement at this stage could include: • Public notice • Letter • Email • Local media • Leaflet • Public exhibitions or meetings • Workshops The Council must take into account any representations received and identify and publish the main issues that emerge.
3. Publication (Regulations 17 and 19) The local plan / DPD is finalised and	• All those who were invited to comment at stage 2 (initial consultation and continued work on	The main way the Council will seek to engage will be via the online consultation software (iNovem). Documents

published for a 6 week period of consultation. Comments at this stage will only be sought on soundness and legal compliance of the plan.	evidence gathering) and stage 3 (publication). • All those who commented at stage 2 (initial consultation and continued work on evidence gathering) and stage 3 (publication). • Any other person, organisation or interest group who wishes to engage	will also be made available for inspection at the Council's principal office and elsewhere as appropriate (e.g. local area offices and public libraries) and on the Council's website (Regulation 35). Methods of involvement at this stage could include: • Public notice • Letter • Email • Local media • Leaflet • Public exhibitions or meetings • Workshops The Council must take into account any representations received and identify and publish the main issues that emerge.
4. Submission (Regulation 22) The draft local plan / DPD, and all supporting documents and the comments received from public consultation are submitted to the Secretary of State, who appoints an independent planning inspector. Documents are made available to view for a 6 week period.	• All those who were invited to comment at stage 2 (initial consultation and continued work on evidence gathering) and stage 3 (publication). • All those who commented at stage 2 (initial consultation and continued work on evidence gathering) and stage 3 (publication).	The main way the Council will seek to engage will be via the online consultation software (iNovem). Documents will also be made available for inspection at the Council's principal office and elsewhere as appropriate (e.g. local area offices and public libraries) and on the Council's website (Regulation 35). • Public Notice • Email / letter
5. Public examination (Regulation 23)	Those who made representations at stage 4 (submission).	The person who is appointed to carry out the independent examination considers main issues raised at the Submission stage.
6. Adoption The local plan / DPD is adopted following the consideration of the recommendations in the inspector's report.	All respondents Any person who has asked to be notified of the adoption of the document	

Supplementary Planning Documents go through the following stages:

- **Pre-production** survey and initial evidence gathering.
- **Public participation** seeking comments on a draft of the Supplementary Planning Document.
- **Adoption** the Council considers all comments received and adopts the SPD, whether amended or not.

Evidence base documents

- 2.11 As part of the plan making process the Council will be producing (or commissioning external consultants to produce) evidence base documents that support the local plan. Where appropriate the Council will consult relevant 'specific' or 'general' consultation bodies on the contents of that evidence including working proactively with other authorities on strategic cross boundary issues in line with the duty to co-operate.
- 2.12 The Authority's Monitoring Report (AMR) is an evidence base document that helps the Council assess if local plan policies are being delivered or not. They will look at the Council's performance against the monitoring targets set out in the Local Plan. This will include analysis of recent performance in achieving housing targets. The AMR will also assess if the Council is able to demonstrate a five-year supply of housing land, which is an important aspect in decision making. The AMR will be published at least annually, formally signed off by the Council's District Executive Committee, and then published on the website.

The Council's commitment to equality

- 2.13 The Equality Act 2010 places general and specific duties and responsibilities on the Council. The Public Sector Equality Duty, (s149 of the Equality Act 2010), requires the Council to consider all individuals when carrying out our day- to- day work, in shaping our policies, in delivering services, and in relation to our staff.
- 2.14 When carrying out our activities, we are required to have due regard to the need to:
- Eliminate discrimination
 - Advance equality of opportunity
 - Foster good relations between different people
- 2.15 The Specific Duties help the Council to achieve the Equality Duty. These include preparing and publishing equality information and the setting of Equality Objectives⁶.
- 2.16 The Council employs its own Equalities Officer who assists in the formulation of documents. This is particularly relevant to planning which has a role to play in promoting equality of opportunity and cohesion by considering the needs of the community. The Council recognises that equality of opportunity in practice includes ensuring that vulnerable or disadvantaged groups have their voices heard and needs considered. This statement supports that objective through providing guidance on how to get people involved.
- 2.17 Carrying out an Equality Analysis (EqA) on our Planning policies is a way of assessing the effect on different groups protected from discrimination by the Equality Act, (the protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnerships, pregnancy and maternity, race,

⁶ http://www.southsomerset.gov.uk/media/644381/equality_objectives_v6.pdf

religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation). The EqA considers if there are any unintended consequences and if the policies will be fully effective for all groups.

Different equality groups

- 2.18 It is recognised that some sectors of the community may be more difficult to engage in participation in the planning process. These different equality groups may include those with sensory loss, Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities, young people, the elderly, those from deprived neighbourhoods, and Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople. Here the expertise of the South Somerset Corporate Equalities Steering Group will be invaluable as they have direct day-to-day links working with and helping representatives of these parts of the community and will be able to advise on and assist with engagement. Where appropriate the Council will also use its links to these groups through the Equalities Officer, Area Development Teams and Community Health and Leisure Team to enable engagement in the planning process.
- 2.19 Different equality groups will require tailored methods of engagement and this will be assessed on a document-by-document basis

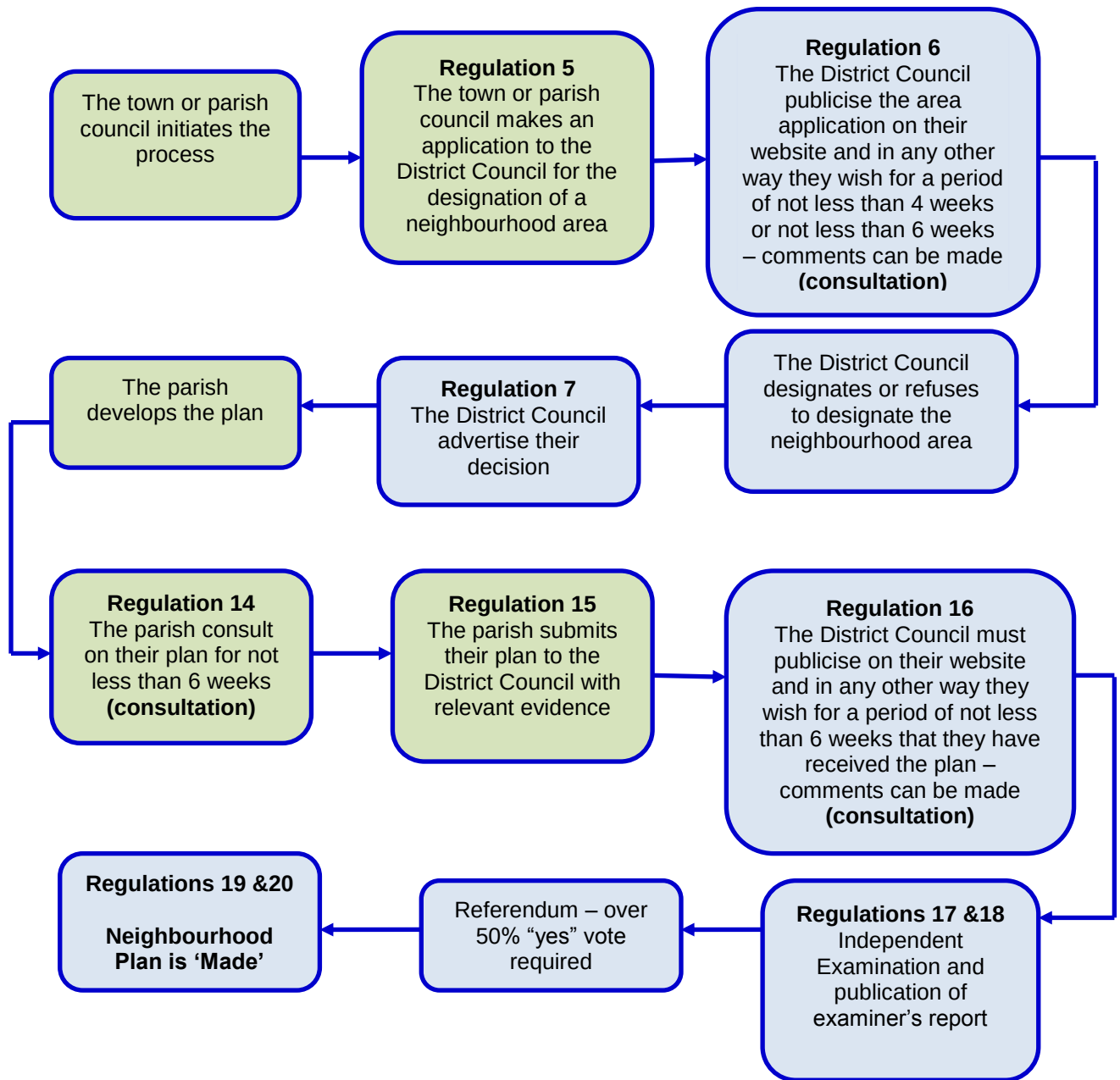
What will happen when I get involved in the local plan / DPD or SPD process?

- 2.20 All relevant comments received will be:
- Acknowledged
 - Recorded on a database
 - Clarified where necessary either by letter, email or telephone
- 2.21 At each consultation stage in the production of a local plan / DPD or SPD, an outline of the consultation undertaken and the main issues arising from that consultation will be reported to District Councillors together with officer recommendations. Details of committee meetings and reports are posted on the Council's website and hard copies are available at Council offices.
- 2.22 The Council allows individuals and group representatives to attend its committee meetings either as observers or to address the members of the committee. Those who wish to make a presentation to a committee are usually given a maximum of 3 minutes. If you do wish to speak at a committee meeting you must first complete a request slip and give it to the Committee Clerk (request slips are available at the meeting and are completed on the day of the meeting).
- 2.23 Where appropriate, comments received suggesting amendments to or raising relevant new issues regarding a local plan / DPD or SPD will be taken into account and the document amended as necessary.

Neighbourhood Plans

- 2.24 Neighbourhood Plans were introduced by the Localism Act 2011 and the process for producing them is set out in The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 as amended (the regulations)⁷.
- 2.25 A neighbourhood plan is a community-led and prepared document for guiding the future development, regeneration and conservation of a parish (or group of parishes). It may contain a vision, aims, planning policies, proposals for improving the area or providing new facilities, or allocation of sites for specific kinds of development. It can deal with a wide range of social, economic and environmental issues (such as housing, employment, heritage and transport) or it may focus on one or two key local issues only. In order to progress to referendum a neighbourhood plan must be examined to ensure that it meets a number of basic conditions i.e. that it has regard to national planning policies, it is in general conformity with the strategic policies of the local plan for the area, it contributes to the achievement of sustainable development and is compatible with European Union law and human rights obligations. Once 'made' a neighbourhood plan becomes part of the development plan so it has statutory weight and its policies along with those in the local plan will be used to determine planning applications.
- 2.26 The key stages for producing a neighbourhood plan are set out in Figure 3, it also identifies when consultation takes place during the process. The statutory requirements of the Council are highlighted in **blue** and parish/town council responsibilities are in **green**.

⁷ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2012/637/contents/made> and http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2015/20/pdfs/ukxiem_20150020_en.pdf

Figure 3: Key Stages in Preparing a Neighbourhood Plan

2.27 The following paragraphs set out how the Council will comply with its statutory duties with regards to consultation on neighbourhood plans.

Regulation 6: Publicising an area application

2.28 At the neighbourhood area application stage where the application is made by a parish or town council and the neighbourhood area relates to the whole area of the parish the District Council will publish the relevant documents for consultation for a period of not less than 4weeks, in all other cases the

consultation period will be for not less than 6 weeks⁸. The following methods will be used:

- Publication on SSDC's website www.southsomerset.gov.uk;
- Request that the town/parish council display the notice with details of how to comment on the parish notice board/parish website/magazine and at local venues they consider will raise awareness of the proposal locally;
- SSDC to send email / letter to adjoining parishes and ward members;
- SSDC to send email / letter to relevant parish and ward member/s;
- Advertise in the local press; and
- Where it is judged to be necessary notify, where known, affected landowners or interest groups.

Regulation 7: Publicising the designation of a neighbourhood area

- 2.29 Once designated the District Council will inform all those it notified at the Regulation 6 stage of their decision to designate the neighbourhood area (or their reasons for not designating the area). The relevant documents will also be posted on the website.

Regulation 16: Plan proposals

- 2.30 Once the town /parish council has submitted its plan to the District Council in accordance with the Regulation 15, the District Council will publicise the plan for consultation for a period of not less than 6 weeks (Regulation 16). The following methods will be used:
- Publication on SSDC's website www.southsomerset.gov.uk;
 - Request that the town/parish council display the notice with details of how to comment on the parish notice board/parish website / magazine and at local venues they consider will raise awareness of the proposal locally;
 - SSDC to send email / letter to adjoining parishes and ward members;
 - SSDC to send email / letter to relevant parish and ward member/s;
 - Advertise in the local press; and
 - Any 'consultation body'⁹ that is referred to in the consultation statement submitted by the town and parish council in accordance with Regulation 15 will be notified via email / letter that the plan proposal has been received.

Regulation 18: Publication of the examiner's report and plan proposal decision, Regulation 19: Decision on a plan proposal and Regulation 20: Publicising a neighbourhood development plan

- 2.31 The District Council are also required to publicise the examiner's report, their decisions on the plan, their decision to 'make' the neighbourhood plan and make the plan publically available once it has been 'made'. This will be done using the following methods:
- Publication on SSDC's website www.southsomerset.gov.uk;

⁸ The Neighbourhood Planning (General) (Amendment) Regulations 2015 2 (2) (amendment to Regulation 6)

⁹ Consultation Bodies are listed in Schedule 1 of The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012

- SSDC to send email / letter to adjoining parishes and ward members;
- SSDC to send email / letter to relevant parish and ward member/s; and
- Advertise in the local press (Regulation 19 only).

2.32 For those working on neighbourhood plans the Area Development Teams can provide advice and support when groups are consulting with their local communities.

3. Planning Applications

- 3.1 One of the key roles of the Council's Development Management Service is to determine a wide range of planning applications. These range from small household extensions, and listed building applications, through to large housing developments. The County Council deal with applications relating to minerals, waste, the County Council's own development and major highway schemes. They are also the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA). As the LLFA they are required to develop a strategy to tackle local flood risks, involving flooding from surface water, 'ordinary watercourses', for example ditches, dykes, and streams, groundwater, canals, lakes and small reservoirs.
- 3.2 As part of its planning function, the Council is required to notify owners and occupiers of neighbouring properties along with the relevant statutory consultees on the planning applications it receives.
- 3.3 The NPPF expects Councils to have a positive approach to decision-taking in order to deliver sustainable development. They are expected to work proactively with applicants to secure developments that improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area. It is clear that efficiency and effectiveness can be improved by good quality pre-application discussion and Councils are expected to encourage other parties to engage with them before submitting a planning application. Where they think this would be beneficial they should also encourage any applicants who are not already required to by law to engage with the local community before submitting their applications.¹⁰ The SCI therefore outlines the level of community involvement and pre-application discussion that the Council will expect to be undertaken before an application is submitted. The level of pre-application consultation and particularly early public engagement will be determined by the type and scale of the application.

Pre-Application Discussions

- 3.4 Applicants and/or agents will be encouraged to contact the Council at the pre-application stage to discuss what the Council will expect in terms of pre-application consultation and early public involvement. The level of early community involvement will be dependent upon the nature and scale of the application, as set out below.

Major Applications

- 3.5 Applicants making an application for major development (e.g. large housing projects, large renewable energy applications, industrial development) are encouraged to engage with the local community and relevant interest groups prior to submission of applications. Where appropriate, the submission of a statement of community involvement will be sought as supporting information. Pre-application documents will be required to be at a level of detail sufficient

¹⁰ National Planning Policy Framework (CLG, 2012), paragraphs 186 -195

to enable assessment of the main issues raised by the proposed development.

- 3.6 In appropriate circumstances, the Council will enter into Planning Performance Agreements, to agree timetables for determination of applications, as advised in the National Planning Policy Framework (paragraph 195).

All other applications

- 3.7 Householders and other applicants and/or agents are encouraged to consider matters such as loss of privacy and light, noise, odour or pollution and to discuss/show their plans to neighbours before submitting a planning application. If the application is within or adjoins a Conservation Area, or relates to a listed building or its setting, then advice should be sought from the relevant Development Management Team and/or one of the Conservation Planners.

Benefits of Pre-application discussions

- 3.8 Pre-application discussions and early public participation have a number of benefits including being a useful means of resolving issues that may result in public objections at a later stage and helping to ensure an inclusive and transparent process. Further benefits are to improve the overall quality of the application that is submitted, to assist the Council to make timely decisions and ensure that applicants do not experience unnecessary delays and costs. This can be achieved for example by the Council giving early advice to applicants on the type of supporting information that should accompany an application, advice on design and landscape issues and providing contact details for other relevant consultees, for example County Highways.
- 3.9 Pre-application discussions are undertaken in confidence. Normally this would involve the submission of sketch drawings and other relevant detail. Evidence of and results of pre-application community consultation should be submitted as part of a formal planning application. However, it must be stressed that the Council cannot refuse to accept a valid application because an applicant has either not undertaken pre application consultation or has undertaken pre-application consultation using a different method to that outlined in the SCI.

Validation Checklist

- 3.10 In order to improve the Council's service in terms of pre application advice and information, the Council's Development Management Service has prepared a validation checklist. This can be seen on the Council's website <http://www.southsomerset.gov.uk/media/176496/validation%20document%202007.pdf>. The checklist provides guidance to applicants/ agents on the scope of material that should be supplied with a planning application, and benefits the applicant in terms of providing greater certainty as to the nature and extent of information required in order to validate the application. It also benefits the local authority by helping to achieve good standards of performance.

Approaches to Early Community Involvement

- 3.11 Small-scale applications (e.g. householder applications, minor changes of use, small-scale operational development) would not normally be subject to extensive community-wide pre-application community consultation.
- 3.12 Applicants submitting more complex applications would be advised to consider various consultation methods as follows:

Table 2: Pre-application Consultation with the Community

Type of Application	Suggested methods of pre-application consultation
Applications where there are considerable issues of scale and controversy, or where the application is contrary to or out of line with the Development Plan ¹¹ (a “departure” application).	Public meeting(s); public exhibition(s); early engagement with Parish Council(s); media engagement (as appropriate); discussions with case officer to assist with internal and external consultees; general discussion with case officer.
Applications that are broadly in accordance with the Development Plan BUT raising controversial issues or detail.	Discussions arranged with case officer, involving external consultees as necessary.
Development where an Environmental Impact Assessment is required.	Seek screening/scoping opinion; engagement with case officer to liaise with consultees; general discussion with case officer.
Applications of a scale or development area for which the LPA requires wider community involvement e.g. applications that fall within sites that are “sensitive” to development pressures and allocated sites that may not have generated significant objection through the local plan process for example applications of “local significance” that the LPA considers requires wider community involvement.	Public meeting(s); public exhibition(s); media engagement (as appropriate); early engagement with Parish Council(s); discussions with case officer to assist with and advise on appropriate internal and external consultees; general discussion with case officer.

¹¹ The Development Plan is the adopted Local Plan and any Neighbourhood Plans that are ‘Made’

Dealing with Applications - what happens following receipt of an application?

- 3.13 Upon receipt and validation of an application, the application is allocated to a case officer.
- All relevant neighbours, parish/town Council, and other relevant statutory and non-statutory consultees are notified of the application.
 - Advertisements, where required, are placed in the local press and on site.

Statutory and other Consultees

- 3.14 All statutory and other consultees will receive notification of relevant planning applications;
- Statutory consultees include Highways England, the Environment Agency and Natural England;
 - Parish/town Councils are consulted on all applications within their area;
 - Other consultees would include bodies such as the LLFA¹²
 - There is a statutory period of 21 days within which comments should be received by the Council. Comments received after this period but before the application is determined will be considered.

Weekly List

- 3.15 The Council produces a weekly list of registered and determined planning applications; you can sign up to receive a copy through the Council's web site: <http://www.southsomerset.gov.uk/my-account/my-planning/>

Neighbour Notification

- 3.16 Although not required by legislation, South Somerset District Council will normally notify via letter all owners and/or occupiers of adjoining properties about the submission of a planning application.
- The notification letter provides the application number, name of case officer, details of where to view the application, and how/where to forward any comments.
 - Any person or consultee who wishes to view any particular application is able to do so via the Council's website; www.southsomerset.gov.uk or by visiting the relevant parish/town Council or the District Council Offices at Brympton Way, Yeovil.
 - Relevant comments may be forwarded to the Council via fax, email, website and letter.
 - Anyone wishing to make representations to the Council has a period of 21 days from the date of the notification letter to submit their comments.
 - Dependent upon the nature, scale and wider possible impact of a proposed development, wider neighbour notification may be appropriate.

Site Notices

¹² All bodies with responsibilities relating to flood risk are members of the Somerset Rivers Authority which was launched in January 2015. See the SRA website at <http://www.somersetiversauthority.org.uk/>

3.17 For certain applications, it is a statutory requirement to display a site notice and advertise in the local newspaper(s). These applications include those that are:

- accompanied by an Environmental Statement as required by the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Assessment) (England and Wales) Regulations 2011;
- departures from the Development Plan;
- applications for Listed Building and Conservation Area Consent and development that will affect the character or setting of a listed building or the character or appearance of a Conservation Area;
- ‘major’¹³ applications; and
- notification/application involving ‘permitted’ development under the General Permitted Development Order.

3.18 A site notice may also be erected for ‘general interest’. This is usually in rural areas where there are no immediate neighbours or where it is difficult to identify adjoining owners/occupiers. There may also be occasions where an officer, using their professional judgement, may consider it appropriate to put up a site notice because they consider that the application may be of a wider public interest.

Submission of Comments

3.19 Comments on any application can be forwarded to the Council via the website, email and letter:

- Anyone who has an interest in an application can make representations even though they may not have received a notification letter.
- Any relevant comments made will be treated as a “material consideration” within the context of national and local policy.
- The deadline for submitting comments is 21 days from the date stated on the letter and/or site notice and from the publication of the paper advertisement (where advertised). However, bodies such as Historic England will be allowed a longer period of time to comment on applications where this is prescribed by legislation.
- Comments will be scanned, placed onto the electronic document management system and are made available for public inspection.
- An acknowledgment letter is sent to those who have made representations.
- All relevant comments received are taken into account by the case officer when considering the application.
- The Council will also inform those who have made representations:
 - If the application is due to be considered at an area committee; and
 - If any amended plans are received
- The Council will not publish or take into account any discriminatory or libellous comments

Amendment of Application Details

¹³ Applications for 10 or more dwellings and 1,000 sq m or more for economic development

- 3.20 Where an application has been amended, whether to meet changed requirements of the applicant or to respond to issues raised during the consultation process, it may be necessary to re-consult neighbours and other consultees. Where appropriate, this is done in writing, allowing a clearly specified period (generally 14 days) for the receipt of further comments. In accordance with current Government guidance, the period for consultation would need to balance the need for consultees to be given adequate time to consider the issues raised against the need for efficient decision making.

Scheme of Delegation

- 3.21 The Council operates a scheme of delegation.
- In brief, it gives authority to the Development Manager to issue decisions on the majority of applications without the need to refer the application to the relevant Area Committee.
 - For further information on the scheme of delegation, please see here: http://www.southsomerset.gov.uk/media/120189/scheme_of_delegation_aug11_.pdf or contact the Development Management Service on 01935 462462.

Area Committee Meetings

- 3.22 Any application that is referred to Committee will be considered by one of the relevant 4 Area Committees.
- Each Area Committee meets once a month on successive Wednesdays throughout the month.
 - Meetings are usually held either at the Council offices or at local village halls/public buildings within the relevant district area.
 - Committee reports are made publicly available 5 working days before the meeting and are available on the Council's website (please see under agenda/minutes). Paper copies are available at the Council offices and distributed on the day of the meeting.
 - Applicants and persons who have made representations on applications are advised in writing of the time and place of the meeting.

Regulation Committee

- 3.23 A small number of applications may need to be referred from one of the Area Committees to the Regulation Committee for example, a major application that is contrary to the adopted local plan or an application raising controversial issues. Where possible the need for an application to be determined at Regulation Committee will be identified prior to the Area Committee meeting.
- The Regulation Committee is held monthly in the Council Chamber at Brympton Way, Yeovil.
 - Those who have made comments on an application that is being referred to Regulation Committee will be informed of the fact.
 - The committee report will be made available 5 working days before the meeting and can be viewed on the Council's website. Paper copies are available at the Council offices.

Public Speaking at all Committee Meetings

- 3.24 The Council provides an opportunity for a member of the public and/or any other interested person to address the committee -a maximum of 3 minutes is given.
- For larger or more controversial applications where many people may wish to speak, the Chairman will normally ask that a spokesperson be appointed to address the committee.
 - Those wishing to speak are advised to fill in a slip and pass to the Committee clerk either at the beginning of the meeting or during the break, which is usually held before consideration of planning applications.

Post Decision

- 3.25 All planning decisions are available to view on the Council's website.

Planning Appeals

- 3.26 An applicant has the right of appeal against a refusal of planning permission and against any conditions attached to a permission. The applicant also has the ability to appeal against non-determination if no decision is made within the required time period
- Appeals are lodged with the Planning Inspectorate
 - Appeals are considered by an independent Planning Inspector.
 - The right of appeal currently only extends to the applicant and not to any third parties.
 - The Council will write to those who were originally consulted informing them of the appeal and outlining the appeal process.
- 3.27 There are 3 types of appeal:
- Written Representations
 - Informal Hearing
 - Public Inquiry
- 3.28 Most appeals are considered via written representations. The more complex and controversial applications are usually considered via a hearing or Public Inquiry. Irrespective of the type of appeal, members of the public and any other interested parties are given an opportunity to forward comments to the Planning Inspectorate.
- 3.29 A time limit of 6 weeks is allowed in which comments can be forwarded to the Planning Inspector. Applicants, agents and third parties are given an opportunity to address the Inspector during an Informal Hearing and Public Inquiry.
- 3.30 For further information on any aspect of the appeal process please see <http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/planning/planninginspectorate>

General

- 3.31 The Council operates a Duty Planning Officer system to deal with simple enquiries, as well as offering general planning and procedural advice. This is available Monday to Thursday between 8.45 am and 5.15pm and between 8.45 am and 4.45 pm on Fridays in the reception at the Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil or on the phone: 01935 462462.
- 3.32 A 'Planning Surgery' system (a duty officer) is also available in Wincanton (Churchfields) every Monday morning between 9am and 1 pm; and in Chard (Holyrood Lace Mill) every Tuesday morning between 9.30am and 1pm.

4. Resources Available for Community Involvement

- 4.1 The Council is committed to effective community engagement and intends to continue this commitment through the Statement of Community Involvement. To assist the Spatial Policy and Development Management Teams, the Council has a number of trained community facilitators in the Area Development Teams who can offer advice and guidance on a range of community related issues including methods of engaging with different groups within South Somerset. These could include:
- Planning for Real[®] exercises
 - Workshops
 - Drop in events
- 4.2 The following staff/teams/services will also provide valuable input in the production of planning documents:
- Economic Development Team;
 - Strategic Housing;
 - Development Management;
 - Environmental Health;
 - Community Health and Leisure Team; and
 - Equalities Officer.
- 4.3 The assistance of Planning Aid South West may be called upon as necessary or appropriate.
- 4.4 The proposed methods of engagement reflect past experience of what has worked well although the SCI provides the opportunity to review the methods of engagement, particularly in reaching and engaging with hard to reach groups. The Council, however, must be realistic in what it can undertake and achieve given the level of staff and economic resources available and the commitment to providing value for money for its residents.
- 4.5 Where planning applications are concerned the onus will be on the applicants and their agents to undertake pre-application consultation activities where appropriate although the Council's advisory role will have resource implications.

5. Monitoring and Mechanisms for Review

- 5.1 The Statement of Community Involvement will be kept under review and revised where necessary following the same procedures. Revisions should only need to be made when significant changes occur in the planning process or the Council wishes to revise how it engages with the community.
- 5.2 In plan making it is intended to continue the practise of asking those who are consulted if they wish to continue being consulted on a particular document to prevent involving those who no longer wish to be. Additionally the Spatial Policy consultation database will be amended and updated as address details change or where an additional consultee asks to be added.
- 5.3 The Council will review the procedures for involving the community in plan-making and planning applications to ensure it achieves a representative level of public involvement.

Appendix 1: Consultation Bodies

This Appendix lists the Specific Consultation Bodies, General Consultation Bodies and other Consultees the LPA may consult, where applicable, on the preparation of our planning documents. Members of the public and agents and other groups that are on our existing database will also be consulted. **If you want to check that you are on or would like to be added to our database please do not hesitate to contact the Spatial Policy Team: Please also let us know if you no longer wish to be included on our database and do not wish to receive any further letters and/or consultation documents.**

Specific Consultation Bodies – (these are defined in the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012)

- a) The Coal Authority
- b) The Environment Agency
- c) Historic England
- d) The Marine Management Organisation
- e) Natural England
- f) Network Rail Infrastructure Ltd (company number 2904587)
- g) Highways England
- h) A relevant authority any part of whose area is in or adjoins the LPA's area:

Somerset:	South Somerset Town and Parish Councils
	Somerset County Council
	Mendip District Council
	Sedgemoor District Council
	Taunton Deane Borough Council
Dorset:	Dorset County Council
	North Dorset District Council
	West Dorset District Council
Wiltshire	Wiltshire Council
Devon	Devon County Council
	East Devon District Council

Adjoining Parish Councils that fall outside South Somerset District Council's administrative boundaries:

Ashcott Parish Council Baltonsborough Parish Council Batcombe Parish Council Bickenhall Parish Council Bourton Parish Council Bradford Abbas Parish Council Broadwindsor Parish Council Buckhorn Weston and Kingston Magna Parish Council Burrowbridge Parish Council Butleigh Parish Council Chardstock Parish Council Chedington Parish Council Churchstanton Parish Council Clifton Maybank Parish Council Curland Parish Council Ditcheat Parish Council Fifehead Magdalen Parish Meeting Gillingham Town Council Goathill Parish Council Greinton Parish Council Halstock Parish Council Hatch Beauchamp Parish Council Kilminster Parish Council Lamyatt Parish Meeting Lydford on Fosse Parish Council Maiden Bradley with Yarnfield Parish Council Marnhull Parish Council	Melbury Osmund Parish Council Membury Parish Council Milton Clevedon Parish Meeting Mosterton Parish Council North Curry Parish Council Othery Parish Council Otterford Parish Council Purse Caundle Parish Council Queen Thorne Group (Nether Compton, Over Compton, Trent & Sandford Orcas Parish Councils) Ryme Intrinseca Parish Council Seaborough Parish Council Silton Parish Meeting Stalbridge Town Council Staple Fitzpaine Parish Council Stoke St Gregory Parish Council Stourton with Gasper Parish Council Street Parish Council Thornecombe Parish Council Upton Noble Parish Meeting Walton Parish Council West Bradley Parish Meeting Witham Friary Parish Council Yarcombe Parish Council Yeo Head Group (Poyntington & Osborne) Parish Council Zeals Parish Council
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- i) Any person:
 - a. to whom the electronic communications code applies
 - b. who owns or controls electronic communications apparatus in the district
- j) If it operates within the district:
 - a. Clinical Commissioning Groups;
 - b. Electricity licence holder
 - c. Gas licence holder
 - d. Sewerage undertaker
 - e. Water undertaker
- K) Homes and Communities Agency

General Consultation Bodies (these are defined in the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012)

General Consultation Bodies are:

- a) Voluntary bodies whose activities benefit any part of the district;
- b) Bodies which represent the interests of different racial, ethnic, or national groups in the district;
- c) Bodies which represent the interests of different religious groups in the district;
- d) Bodies which represent the interests of persons with disabilities in the district; and
- e) Bodies which represent the interests of persons carrying out business in the district.

Other consultees

Other consultees are residents or other persons carrying on business in the district which are considered appropriate to invite to make representations. These are in addition to the specific and general consultation bodies and would be on the Spatial Policy Team's consultation database.

Duty to Co-operate Prescribed Bodies (these are defined in the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012)

- a) The Environment Agency;
- b) Historic England;
- c) Natural England;
- d) The Mayor of London (not relevant for South Somerset District Council);
- e) The Civil Aviation Authority;
- f) The Homes and Communities Agency;
- g) Clinical Commissioning Groups (as established by the National Health Service Act 2006);
- h) The Office of Rail & Road
- i) Transport for London (not relevant for South Somerset District Council)
- j) Each Integrated Transport Authority (not relevant for South Somerset District Council)
- k) Highways England
- l) The Marine Management Organisation (not relevant for South Somerset District Council)

The Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and Local Nature Partnership (LNP) are not subject to the requirements of the 'duty' but local planning authorities and the public bodies that are subject to the duty must cooperate with LEPs and LNPs and have regard to their activities when they are preparing their Local Plans, so long as those activities are relevant to local plan making.

Appendix 2: Methods of engagement for development plan documents and supplementary planning documents

Method	What it is	Advantages	Disadvantages
Letter	Written form of communication sent directly to an individual, group or organisation.	Sends information directly to a targeted individual. Can provide users with detailed, comprehensive information. Helps to fulfil the statutory requirement to inform.	Can be seen as impersonal and remote from the community. Letter can be misunderstood. Very large mail shots can be expensive.
Email	Message sent from a computer either directly through the users own email provider or through the Council's website.	Opportunity for distributing information and material quickly and widely at a lower cost. At any time of the day or night. Can be useful for reaching certain groups (e.g. young people) or more remote rural areas.	Access to the internet is variable and can therefore exclude those without access. Technical problems may arise.
Telephone	System that allows you to speak directly to an individual in another place.	Allows for direct, easy dissemination or collection of information. Allows for two-way dialogue, which ensures a better understanding.	Impractical when seeking to contact large numbers of people in terms of time and cost. Difficult to convey large quantities of information.

Meetings	Officer meeting - where a selected group of officers are invited to discuss a particular issue. Public meeting - where the event is held in a public place is publicised and an open invitation to attend given. At the meeting an Officer/Officers from the Council and possibly local Councillors and or developers will be available to answer questions. Steering Group – where a selected group of Councillors, with officer support, are invited to discuss a particular issue to provide a political steer.	Enables Officers to gain the views of the invited group of people and where it is a steering group to gain an important political steer at an early stage. Allows the public to give their views to ensure a better understanding in an efficient way. Can be tailored to large or small audiences.	May attract only a limited number of people who may be unrepresentative of the local community. Can be dominated by activists or those most confident at speaking in public. Issues raised tend to be very local or personal.
Committee Reports and Meetings	Officers of the Council produce committee reports in order to inform Councillors of processes that have been gone through or of representations that have been received on a document. They make a recommendation in that report and Councillors make a decision based on the information and recommendation/s in front of them. Committee meetings are open to the public.	Offers the opportunity for attendees to take part in the formal decision making process by allowing them to speak to local Councillors when they are making decisions.	A formal setting such as this – requires the speaker to be confident making their point in a public meeting. Participant is limited to 3 minutes in which to make their point.
Public Notice	The Council places public notices in local newspapers at consultation stages of the plan process. The Notice is to let everyone know that a document has been published and that representations can be made on the contents of that document. It also tells you what the document is where you can	Provides the opportunity to inform a wide range of local people of the consultation that is taking place.	Formal wording may discourage the community from engaging with or taking part in the process.

	see it, where and when by representations must be sent.		
Workshops	Where a selected group of people are invited to discuss a particular issue. Usually takes the form of a presentation followed by breaking out into discussion groups in order to try and answer particular questions or to present ideas and options.	Effective for dealing with more complex issues. Gives the selected attendees an opportunity to discuss different issues and options. Useful for including groups that may often feel excluded i.e. hard to reach groups. Gives Officers the opportunity to learn from those involved.	Can be resource intensive to run i.e. may require the booking of a hall or the provision of refreshments and multiple officer attendance.
SSDC Website	A way of presenting information about the Council by means of electronic communication (i.e. the computer). Also offers the opportunity to fill in online forms and surveys and in some instances provides the opportunity to use the Council's online consultation software. SSDC's website address is: www.southsomerset.gov.uk	The Council is statutorily required to put Local Plan/ DPD, SPDs and Neighbourhood Plan documents on their website. Opportunity for distributing information and material quickly and widely at a lower cost. At any time of the day or night. Can be useful for reaching certain groups (e.g. young people) or more remote rural areas.	Access to the internet is variable and can therefore exclude those without access. Technical problems may arise.

		Enables information to be managed and update in an efficient way.	
Local Media	Local radio, television or newspapers.	Reaches large audiences. Good for getting a message across quickly in a clear and understandable way.	Could be expensive. Suited to larger scale or more contentious issues in the broader public interest.
Press Release	An information bulletin that is sent to local newspapers, radio and television stations.	Reaches large audiences. Good for getting a message across quickly in a clear and understandable way.	Depends on the newspaper/TV station/radio station being interested picking up the story.
Parish/Town Council Newsletters	Many parish and town Councils have a newsletter that they distribute to their parishioners advising them of local issues.	Excellent way of engaging Parish Councils and using their local knowledge. Good for addressing local issues.	Dependent on the Parish Council producing a newsletter and having a particular interest in the subject / issue.
Leaflet/questionnaire	A short paper document containing information sent directly to consultees or interested parties – can also be left in Council Offices and other public places. May also sometimes include a tear off questionnaire.	Sends information directly to an individual in an attractive way. Can provide users with a summary of the main points in an easy to understand way. Questionnaire element can provide an efficient way of making a response.	May not always generate a large response rate. Could be misunderstood or questions could be tailored towards a particular response.

Public Exhibitions / 'drop in' sessions	Plans/text/photographs are displayed on exhibition boards in order to inform and prompt questions. Usually staffed. Can be located in one place or can move around e.g. on exhibition bus. Usually located at village halls or other public places and advertised in advance.	Easy way to publicise issues and provide information. Gives the opportunity for direct feedback from attendees. Gives the public the flexibility of when to attend.	Not always representative due to lack of accessibility and the timing of an event. Can be poorly attended. Limited feedback.
Planning for Real® exercise	This is where representatives of the community are brought together in a village hall or other public place and issues particular to that neighbourhood are identified (on option cards). A three dimensional map is built of the local area and people can use the option cards to mark on the plan what they want and where they want it. All the options are then prioritised as either 'now', 'soon' or 'later' and this information can then be fed into the document.	Can reach the parts of the community that do not usually attend meetings e.g. families. It is a participatory consultation method. Raises issues in a non-confrontational way. Does not require those who participate to be experienced or articulate speakers. It is mobile and flexible.	Limited scope in its application – normally used for a site or location specific issue or Neighbourhood Plan. Can lead to heightened expectations.
Comments form	If you want to make a representation on a document you can use a comments form. These are produced at the formal stages of consultation and will ask for comments relating to the consultation matter and specific information that is required by the Council and the Inspectorate to ensure that	Provides a structure for the respondent to put down his/her comments in a considered structured way. Provides the Council & Inspectorate	Forms may be filled in incorrectly or questions missed out or misunderstood.

	the representation is properly considered and assessed.	with the information they need in a structured way.	
Visits to exemplar projects	Would involve inviting selected stakeholders to visit to a particularly successful project.	Will help to inform attendees on a particular issue e.g. a visit to a scheme where the use of renewable energy has been particularly successful.	Only feasible for small groups of people. Limited number of opportunities to be used.

Appendix 3: Acronyms

The following is a list of acronyms used in this document:

Acronym	Meaning
The Council	South Somerset District Council
SSDC	South Somerset District Council
iNovem	South Somerset District Council's on line software package which allows response to consultations to be made online.
SCI	Statement of Community Involvement
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework (CLG, March 2012)
NPPG	National Planning Practice Guidance
CIL	Community Infrastructure Levy
DPD	Development Plan Document
SPD	Supplementary Planning Document
LDS	Local Development Scheme
AMR	Authority's Monitoring Report
SA	Sustainability Appraisal
LLFA	Lead Local Flood Authority
SRA	Somerset Rivers Authority
EqA	Equality Analysis
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic

LEP	Local Enterprise Partnership
LNP	Local Nature Partnership