

Walsall Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)

Revised November 2018

Temporary Addendum for COVID-19
Legislative Changes and Guidance

January 2021



Walsall Council

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Amendments to SCI Chapters

Chapter 1 | Introduction

Under legislative changes in response to the COVID-19 Coronavirus pandemic¹, where any of the policies in the Statement of Community Involvement cannot be complied with due to current guidance to help combat the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19), the local planning authority is encouraged to undertake an immediate review and update the policies where necessary so that plan-making can continue. This follows subsequent updates to this legislation in 2020.²

This addendum is intended to outline temporary amendments we are making in response to these changes to enable us to continue effective consultation and community and stakeholder engagement during this ongoing crisis. We are not updating the Statement of Community Involvement (2018) policy entirely as we are required to make immediate changes in response to temporary emergency legislation.

These temporary amendments are intended to promote effective community engagement by means that are reasonably practicable, focussing on online engagement methods, including virtual exhibitions, digital consultations, video conferencing, social media and providing documents for inspection on a public website, details of these methods are outlined in Appendix C.

As a Local Authority we also have a duty of care to our residents and are minded to ensure full compliance with COVID-19 rules as a public safety measure, done with the interest of keeping the most vulnerable in our communities safe from harm, and reducing risk to the rest of society as well.

While there is no requirement in legislation for local planning authorities to consult when reviewing and updating their Statement of Community Involvement, we have historically done so. We did this first at the document's inception in 2006, at first review in 2012 and at the latest update in 2018³.

This temporary addendum will be repealed at the conclusion of the pandemic, conclusion of nationally led control measures or ending of the relevant legislation and when Walsall Council's local procedures permit the normal recurrence of such activities with the lifting of local COVID-19 restrictions.

As such, given their immediate nature and with a view to remaining in-line with active legislation, we will not be consulting on the information outlined in this document although its publication has been procedurally cleared by Walsall's legal officers and approval granted from the leader of the council.

¹ The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning, Development Management Procedure, Listed Buildings etc.) (England) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 - They temporarily remove the requirement on a local planning authority to make documents available for public inspection at the authority's principal office and at such other places as the authority considers appropriate. They also make temporary changes to regulation 36 of the 2012 Regulations to remove the requirement on a local planning authority to provide hard copies of documents made available under regulation 35. Documents are still required to be made available on the local planning authority's website. This modification will apply until 31 December 2021

² This guidance first emerged in March 2020 and first came into force in July 2020, later revised and extended in December 2020 and are likely to be revised and extended again

³ See details of past consultations on our SCI page:

https://go.walsall.gov.uk/ldf_statement_of_community_involvement

Chapter 2 | Walsall's approach to community involvement

Where opportunities exist to

- advertise widely the opportunities for involvement
- allow people to put forward ideas and comment
- create a transparent process for considering any comments received

Only methods that do not involve face-to-face meeting will be used while central government COVID-19 guidance remains in force. For a range of these, please refer to Appendix C.

Any correspondence can only be received digitally via email or online forms via the council website, by calling us or by posting a letter, as face-to-face contact is restricted as a result of temporary central government COVID-19 legislation and rules around social distancing.

Chapter 4 | The planning process and the Statement of Community Involvement

(Paragraph 4.7) We will account for amendments made as a result of central government changes to consultation requirements as a result of COVID-19 in proving for how we have met the requirements of the SCI in producing future local plan documents and SPDs and in deciding planning applications.

(Paragraph 4.8) Temporary amendments have been made to consultation requirements⁴ which will ensure that the minimum standards for publicity, consultation and their inclusion in the Local Plan evidence base also take account of any ongoing restrictions brought about by Government legislation and regulations relating to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic at the time of that consultation.

Chapter 5 | Local Plan stages of involvement

(Figure 5: The Local Plan Process and our approach to involvement; Stage 1 – Involvement in the pre-production stage)

Techniques that involve face-to-face engagement will not be considered nor utilised during the temporary legislation around COVID-19 and the need to maintain social distancing and in response to the closure of key community spaces, stores and amenities.

Possible involvement techniques may now instead compromise mailing list contact, virtual/online presentations; question and answer sessions, community events and focus groups.

Chapter 6 | Supplementary Planning Documents stages of involvement

(Figure 7: The Supplementary Planning Document Process and our approach to involvement; Stage 1 – Involvement in the pre-production stage)

Techniques that involve face-to-face engagement will not be considered nor utilised during the temporary legislation around COVID-19 and the need to maintain social distancing and in response to the closure of key community spaces, stores and amenities.

Possible involvement techniques may now instead compromise mailing list contact, virtual/online presentations; question and answer sessions, community events and focus groups.

⁴ These amendments can be found at (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/plan-making#covid19>)

Chapter 10 | Conservation Area Characterisation Appraisal

(Consultation on CACAs, Paragraph 10.4) When undertaking consultation on CACAs the Council will no longer:

- Include the relevant document in the nearby library and/or community centre along with the central library and planning reception
- Host a public meeting in the area to discuss the CACA

As face-to-face methods are temporarily unavailable in light of central government COVID-19 guidance and social distancing rules and accounting for the closure of libraries, community spaces and public offices, we will instead use a selection of virtual engagement methods as outlined in Appendix C.

Chapter 11 | Involvement in Article 4 Directions

(Introduction to Article 4 Directions, Paragraph 11.6) When producing an Article 4 Directive the Council will no longer:

- Make all relevant documents available in the main library and at the planning reception.

But instead make these available only on the website or as a hard copy by post on request made in writing to us, via email or over-the-phone. Face-to-face options are temporarily unavailable in light of central government COVID-19 guidance and social distancing rules.

Chapter 13 | Resources and Monitoring

(Resources, Paragraph 13.3) We will have a renewed focus on taking advantage of online community engagement including the use of social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook. We will work closely with the Council's communication team to ensure we utilise new opportunities to engage with communities. This is especially relevant following recent changes to community engagement in the government's COVID-19 guidelines and social distance rulings.

(Paragraph 13.6) Model evaluation forms (included in Appendix E) will only be issued digitally or via the post by email, in writing or over-the-phone request and should be returned digitally or via the post, as face-to-face contact should be avoided in-line with social distancing rules.

(Monitoring, Paragraph 13.9) The nominated officer responsible for the adoption and operation of this document will support the community involvement related to the emerging plans and policies that are continuing to be produced and ensure that it complies with this SCI and the addendum update to the SCI in-line with COVID-19 legislation on public consultation changes.

(Monitoring, Paragraph 13.10) Individual officers will ensure that community involvement in their plans and policies or planning applications complies with this document and make reference to how the plans have been produced in accordance with the SCI and addendum update to the SCI in-line with COVID-19 legislation on public consultation changes.

Chapters 3, 7, 8, 9 & 12

There is no addendum text or COVID-19 related changes or amendments within these chapters.

Amendments to SCI Appendices

Appendix C

Techniques that involve face-to-face engagement will not be considered nor utilised during the temporary legislation around COVID-19 and the need to maintain social distancing and in response to the closure of key community spaces, stores and amenities, which includes methods such as libraries, plasma screens, the consultation bus road shows and interactive displays.

Instead, subscriber-based mailing lists, digitally accessed questionnaires; online/virtual focus Groups and workshops, public meetings, visioning sessions, exhibitions, virtual modelling techniques and digitally hosted videos will be utilised via MS Teams or other available platforms and software.

This is planned in order to maintain a Duty-of-Care to residents and comply with government changes to legislation around public consultation in planning in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which are detailed in Chapter 1 of this addendum.

Appendices A, B, C, D, E & F

There is no addendum text or COVID-19 related changes or amendments within these Appendices.