



Wigan Statement of Community Involvement

September 2023

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) sets out how we will consult and involve people when developing and reviewing planning documents and in the planning application process. It sets out who, how and when we will involve people in these activities.

2. Guiding Principles

- 2.1 Our approach to community involvement in the preparation of our local plans is in line with the advice of Government, including in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, July 2021).
- 2.2 The NPPF states in paragraph 15 that “the planning system should be genuinely plan led”, and in paragraph 16 (c) that “plans should be shaped by early, proportionate and effective engagement between plan-makers and communities, local organisations, businesses, infrastructure providers and operators and statutory consultees.”
- 2.3 Our approach with neighbouring local councils, and other prescribed bodies, accords with NPPF paragraphs 24-27 which place considerable importance on the need for collaboration and joint working in developing strategic policies and priorities.
- 2.4 Our approach to community involvement in the planning application process is in line with paragraph 39 of the NPPF, which advocates “early engagement” for the benefit of “all parties”.
- 2.5 During the Covid-19 pandemic, we had to tailor consultations in line with legal requirements and government guidance, in response to the closure of public buildings and social distancing rules. This placed increased emphasis and reliance upon online engagement methods to enable effective engagement and collaboration on planning matters, which proved successful. Whilst face-to-face engagement and the deposit of hard copies of consultation documents remain important forms of engagement, the increased ability of the council to engage effectively using online tools, means the council is better equipped to respond positively to unforeseen circumstances going forward.

3. Local Plans

- 3.1 We prepare Local Plans to set out our policies for sustainable development to meet the needs and aspirations of the community. Local Plans must be based on up-to-date and relevant evidence about the economic, social and environmental characteristics and prospects of the area. This evidence must be consistent with the principles and policies set out in the NPPF and ensure the enshrining of sustainable development principles within the development strategy and detailed planning policies.
- 3.2 Consultation is required at various stages in their preparation, including the ‘Publication’ stage, after which they are submitted to the Secretary of State for independent examination. The Secretary of State appoints an independent

Planning Inspector to carry out a public examination of the plan, taking into consideration the views of interested people and to assess whether it is positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy. If it is, the inspector will recommend that the council adopts the plan. If it needs to be modified to a reasonable extent, the inspector will recommend that the council adopts the plan having consulted on and made those modifications.

Places for Everyone

- 3.3 Wigan Council is working in partnership with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) and eight other Greater Manchester districts to prepare a joint plan called 'Places for Everyone' (PfE Plan). The PfE Plan will provide a strategic planning policy framework to manage sustainable growth and development across the city region up to 2039.
- 3.4 Preparation of the PfE Plan is now at an advanced stage with only one consultation opportunity remaining, in Autumn 2023, limited to proposed modifications to the plan necessary to make it sound and enable it to be adopted.
- 3.5 Consultation on the Plan is carried out on a joint basis in line with the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 and the nine GM districts' Statements of Community Involvement. Further details can be found at: <https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/planning-and-housing/places-for-everyone/>.

Wigan Local Plan

- 3.6 Wigan Council is in the process of preparing a new Local Plan for the borough. This will sit alongside strategic planning policies set out in the PfE Plan and provide a more detailed and locally specific policy framework to effectively manage the future development of the borough over its plan period.
- 3.7 Based on a series of social, economic and environmental objectives, the Local Plan will likely allocate sites for new development, designate land for specific land uses, safeguard land for supporting infrastructure provision, establish design principles, and include measures to help conserve and enhance the natural and historic environment. The preparation of the Local Plan will involve a series of formal and informal engagement activities, with stakeholders, including local residents, at key stages throughout its development to ensure that people and organisations have sufficient opportunity to be involved and shape its content.

4. Preparing the Plans

- 4.1 Our approach to involvement is set out below. References to 'we' mean the council, or the council in partnership with other councils and/or authorities, such as the GMCA, when the plan area is across district boundaries. References to 'the borough' mean Wigan Borough, or 'Greater Manchester'.

References to 'our website' mean Wigan Council's website, the GMCA's website and other council websites within Greater Manchester as applicable.

Who will we involve?

4.2 At appropriate times during the preparation of a plan, we will involve:

- **Specific consultation bodies** – these are organisations specified by law for consultation as appropriate, including those responsible for services, utilities and infrastructure provision, Parish Councils in and adjacent to the borough, adjoining councils and Government departments.
- **Duty to co-operate prescribed bodies** - these include neighbouring councils and other prescribed bodies as set out in law, many of whom are also specific consultation bodies.
- **General consultation bodies** - these are community and voluntary bodies with an interest in the borough and bodies that represent different racial, ethnic, national or religious groups, disabled persons or persons carrying on business in the borough.
- **Elected representatives** - this includes local councillors, Members of Parliament and the Mayor of Greater Manchester.
- **The general public** - this includes people who live in, work in or visit the borough or have another interest in the borough.
- **Businesses** – those with business interests in the borough.
- **Landowners, developers and agents** – those who have a direct interest in future development and have a major role to play in providing the facilities and services the borough needs.

When will we involve you?

4.3 We will involve you:

- At **commencement**, asking what the plan should contain and engaging with relevant bodies to identify the issues and the evidence needed.
- During **preparation**, as appropriate, when we are gathering evidence, confirming the issues, developing the options for addressing the issues and then the preferred options/approaches, specifically inviting comments on a draft document during a specified time period and considering them prior to the next stage.
- At the **publication** stage, when we publish the proposed submission version of the plan - the draft plan we want to adopt - for formal representations during a period of at least six weeks on the soundness of the plan or whether it complies with legal requirements. Significantly, only

representations made at this stage can be considered at the public examination.

- From **submission**, when we submit the plan to the Government, an independent inspector will be appointed to undertake a **public examination**. People who have made representations at the previous stage can participate in the examination.
- For **proposed modifications** required by the Inspector before the council can adopt the plan, on which we will consult for at least 6 weeks. This is usually procedural as the issues arising should have been fully considered at the public examination.

4.4 How will we involve you?

- We will contact appropriate organisations and individuals as set out in the 'Who?' section directly by email, or by post when it is the only means available. For the general public and businesses, we will only notify those directly who are registered on our Local Plan consultation database. To register, please email planningpolicy@wigan.gov.uk. If you submit comments on our Local Plan during one of our consultations, you will be added to the consultation database unless you choose to opt out.
- We will publicise consultations by methods such as our website, other websites as appropriate, our social media as applicable by press releases to local newspapers and radio, our Borough Life magazine and site notices, as appropriate.
- We will organise meetings, workshops and drop-in sessions in person and/or online as appropriate.
- We will consult online through our website, and on other websites as appropriate, including through questionnaires and consultation documentation.
- We will make paper versions of our consultations documents available at the Wigan Life Centre, The Wiend, Wigan, which is our principal office for visiting members of public, specifically in Wigan Library within that building. Paper copies may also be made available in other public libraries as appropriate. Access to our online consultations will be available on computers in all of our libraries for residents without internet access, with assistance available from library staff if needed.
- We will publish comments received, or a summary of them, as soon as reasonably possible after receipt, and explain subsequently how comments received have been taken into account in preparing the plan. The exception to this is at the formal 'publication' or 'proposed submission' stage of the plan, after which representations are passed to the independent inspector to consider at the public examination, and following

the examination when the inspector recommends proposed modifications to the plan which need to be consulted upon.

- All public buildings used for consultation purposes will be accessible and meet wheelchair access regulations.

5. Neighbourhood Plans

- 5.1 Neighbourhood planning provides communities with the opportunity to produce a Neighbourhood Plan for their local area. Once adopted, Neighbourhood Plans form part of the development plan in that part of the borough, meaning that all planning applications within the designated neighbourhood area need to accord with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 5.2 Neighbourhood Plans are developed by a designated Neighbourhood Forum or Parish Council, with the council having a duty to advise and assist them during the plan's preparation, and to take decisions at key stages in the neighbourhood planning process, within set time limits.
- 5.3 Prior to the preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan, both the Neighbourhood Area and the Neighbourhood Forum (unless a Parish Council) need to be designated by the council. Once a valid application for the designation of an Area and/or Forum is received, we will consult on it for a period of at least six weeks, to determine whether the community organisation applying would be suitable to take the lead on this process, and whether the area proposed is a suitable area for neighbourhood planning purposes.
- 5.4 We will publish the application (and instructions on how to comment) online and, where possible, deposit a paper version at an appropriate and accessible location within the area to which the application relates.
- 5.5 We will advise and assist the development of the Neighbourhood Plan by:
 - Providing evidence and professional advice
 - Advising on national and local planning policy
 - Providing legal advice
 - Assisting with community engagement
 - Providing technical support
 - Signposting to useful websites and resources
 - Providing constructive comments on the draft neighbourhood plan
 - Being available for engagement with the neighbourhood forum or Parish Council.
- 5.6 Within set time limits, we will also:
 - Work with the Neighbourhood Forum to publicise the statutory steps in the development of the Neighbourhood Plan
 - Notify consultation bodies
 - Organise the independent examination

- Publicise the examiner's report and plan proposal decisions
- Organise the public referendum for the neighbourhood area
- Publicise the neighbourhood development plan / order.

5.7 Consultations on a Neighbourhood Plan will be in accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended). This includes:

- Publicising it on the council's website and our social media channels as applicable, to bring the neighbourhood plan document to the attention of people who live, work or carry on business in the area.
- Depositing paper versions of the consultation at an appropriate and accessible location, where possible, within the area to which the plan relates.
- Notifying consultation bodies referred to in the consultation statement submitted by the relevant body that the plan proposal has been received.

6. Supplementary Planning Documents

6.1 We prepare Supplementary Planning Documents to give more detailed advice and guidance on how to meet policies in the Local Plan, for example on design or requirements for affordable housing. They will be a material consideration for relevant planning decisions but are not part of the local development plan.

6.2 Our approach to involving people in preparing Supplementary Planning Documents is similar to preparing Local Plans but with two main differences to **Who** and **When**, as follows:

- **Who?** - There are no specific consultation bodies that we are obliged to consult, as there are with Local Plans. Instead, our consultation on these documents will be focused on those bodies and individuals with an interest in the particular subject, although comments will always be welcomed from others.
- **When?** - Consultation must be carried out during preparation of a supplementary planning document prior to its adoption but, other than that, there are no specified stages. We will always carry out at least one stage of public consultation before we adopt such a document, including producing a draft document.

7. Planning Applications

7.1 Planning permission is generally required for new development and changes of use or appearance of land or buildings. The council believes that community engagement on planning applications brings benefits to the process by enabling the community to understand proposals and express their views on them or suggest changes which would improve them.

7.2 Our approach to involvement is set out below.

7.3 Who will we involve?

- Where neighbour notification is required, adjoining occupiers, being those in properties which have a common boundary with the application site.
- Additional properties depending on the scale, nature, and likely impact of the proposal.
- Statutory and non-statutory bodies, such as the Environment Agency, as appropriate.

7.4 When will we involve you?

- **Pre-application** – Most development proposals benefit from engagement with the local community early in the process and we encourage applicants to undertake community involvement exercises. A balance can be required between the desirability of early engagement and developers' legitimate need for commercial confidentiality at pre-application stage.
- **Application** – We will publicise the proposal and notify neighbours and other interested parties as indicated above to request their views and consider these before making a decision.
- **Where amendments are made which significantly alter the nature or impact of the proposal** – We will carry out further consultations as appropriate and again consider the views received before making a decision.
- **Post-decision** – Copies of decision notices are posted on our website. When decisions are appealed we will notify those who made representations on the application and advise them of the need to make any further comments directly to the Planning Inspectorate.

7.5 How will we involve you?

- Where required, we will contact adjoining occupiers directly by post.
- Statutory and non-statutory bodies will be notified by email.
- We will publicise some applications by site notices or local newspaper advertisements when this is a statutory requirement.
- A period of 21 days from notification is normally specified for the receipt of representations (14 days in press notices).
- All representations relating to material planning matters will be taken into account and summarised in the officer's report when making decisions on applications, including those decided by Planning Committee.

- We will inform those who have made representations on an application if it is to be considered by Planning Committee.
- Members of the public are allowed to address Planning Committee either in support of or in opposition to an application, within prescribed time limits.

8. How to Contact Us

8.1 For all matters relating to the Wigan Local Plan, contact **Planning and Transport Policy** by email at planningpolicy@wigan.gov.uk.

8.2 For all matters relating to planning applications and applications for Listed Building Consent and other planning consents in Wigan, contact **Development Management**:

- By email to: planning@wigan.gov.uk
- By post to: Development Management, Places Directorate, Wigan Council, PO Box 100, Wigan WN1 3DS