

Dorset Council Local Plan

Scoping Consultation Outline and Local Plan Engagement Strategy Preparation

1. Introduction

As part of the new plan-making system councils are expected to spend time preparing before formally starting work on their new local plan. This is to ensure that councils are ready to start the 30-month plan making process and is part of the broader aims for new local plans to be prepared faster and for the process of engaging on local plans to be more accessible.

There are several preparatory tasks that need to be undertaken, including scoping the anticipated content of the new local plan and the preparation of an engagement strategy. The scoping stage must run for a minimum of 4 months during which a scoping consultation must be undertaken. The scoping consultation takes place in advance of Gateway 1 of the plan making process when the 30-month plan making process formally begins.

2. The Scoping Consultation

2.1. Purpose of the scoping consultation

Councils retain discretion of the precise content of the consultation provided the matters are relevant to the preparation of the local plan. The new local plan making regulations do however stipulate that the purpose of the scoping consultation is primarily to inform:

- a) the content of the local plan;
- b) how councils should engage with interested parties as part of the plan making process.

2.2. Content of the scoping consultation

The consultation is scheduled at the start of the new plan making process. It will not include the detail of development or policy proposals, but the outcomes from the scoping consultation should allow the council to:

- start to define the main areas or locally specific subject matters which will be addressed in the new local plan;
- form a draft a vision and to begin to define measurable outcomes which can be used to determine progress towards fulfilling the vision;
- identify and scope the evidence which needs to be gathered to guide the plan's preparation;

- understand need for different types of development in the Dorset Council area;
- set out spatial options and strategies to meet needs and local plan content.

2.3. Issues that will not be covered in the scoping consultation

At this early stage in the plan making process we will not be:

- presenting any details of sites which could be developed to meet the area's needs – the consultation will not seek views on detailed site allocations or present preferred development sites as site-specific matters will be considered at later stages of plan preparation;
- seeking views on sites for development;
- setting out spatial development strategies to meet Dorset's development needs;
- setting out detailed planning policies.

2.4. Issues that will be covered in the scoping consultation

As part of the consultation, we will be seeking views on:

- how we should engage as part of the plan making process.
- the broad topics which should be addressed in the new local plan – as part of this we will outline the scope of National Decision Making Policies in the emerging National Planning Policy Framework and the areas which are likely to fall within the remit of local plan policies.

For example emerging National Decision Making Policy 'PM13: Setting standards' defines a restrictive approach for local plan policies on quantitative standards, and clarifies that plan policies should not cover matters which are already addressed by Building Regulations other than in relation to accessibility standards or water efficiency. This means that the new local plan is not likely to include locally specific quantitative standards relating to environmental performance of buildings.

- the locally specific issues which need to be addressed in the local plan, such as those relating to approaches to the mitigation of habitats sites impacts.
- the scope of evidence needed to support statutory environmental assessment (including Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulation Assessment)

The formal notice of scoping consultation will identify the matters on which representations are invited and the date by which representations must be received. It will be made available in accordance with the statutory publication requirements, including publication on the council's website and availability for inspection.

2.5. Next steps

Following the consultation, the council will publish a summary of the scoping consultation (including the bodies invited), the main issues raised and how the council has had regard to

the representations at that stage. The outcomes of the scoping consultation will inform the preparation of the local plan.

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3. Engagement Strategy

3.1. Introduction

The new planning system requires the preparation of a strategy for engaging the community and other key stakeholders in the preparation of the local plan. This appendix sets out key community engagement principles, the stages of consultation that will be undertaken, who will be consulted and methods that may be used. This will be developed into a full draft engagement strategy with input from the consultation and engagement team.

We will then seek input on the engagement strategy through the scoping consultation and invite people to help shape this strategy. The final engagement strategy will define target audiences and set out clear objectives for consultation.

3.2. Community Engagement Principles

Good quality engagement is essential to provide a strong foundation for the local plan. It is important to engage with a diverse range of groups and people, including bodies with roles such as environmental, housing and transport, parish councils, businesses, voluntary groups and members of the public.

Key principles of good engagement include:

- Starting engagement early
- Being proactive
- Helping people to understand the plan making process and how their feedback will be used
- Using mixed methods of engagement to gather a broad range of insights and ensure consultations are accessible for all

Equalities Act

Under the Equalities Act, the Council must pay “due regard” to the need to the following considerations when preparing the local plan:

1. Eliminate unlawful discrimination.
2. Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic¹ and those who do not.
3. Foster good relations between different groups.

These considerations will be of particular importance at public consultation stages.

¹ Protected characteristics include age, disability, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity, and gender reassignment

Digital first

The Government strongly advocates a ‘digital first’ approach to engagement and presentation of documents. Local planning authorities should prioritise digital formats and comply with defined data standards.

3.3. Stages of local plan consultation

There are three stages of consultation under the new planning system, as set out below.

Scoping Consultation

(Regulation 20)

When?

This consultation stage takes place after the council publishes a notice of intention to commence local plan preparation, and before ‘Gateway 1’.

Purpose

The purpose of this consultation is to invite early engagement around what the local plan should contain and how the local planning authority should engage with people and organisations when preparing the local plan.

Length of consultation

Minimum of 21 days.

Who should be invited to take part?

- Specific consultation bodies that the council considers may have an interest in the preparation of the local plan
- General consultation bodies the council think appropriate
- Other residents or people can also respond

Post consultation

A summary of the outcomes of the scoping consultation will be prepared. The community engagement strategy will be reviewed and finalised. The scoping consultation will inform the content of the proposed local plan.

Consultation on proposed local plan content and evidence

(Regulation 23)

When?

This consultation stage takes place after ‘gateway 1’.

Purpose

The purpose of this consultation is to share the proposed content of the local plan and evidence that has been prepared to support the local plan. This would include:

- a proposed vision and measurable outcomes
- any proposed aims and objectives
- proposed spatial strategy
- summary of evidence we intend to gather and details of any evidence we already have

This is also an opportunity to engage on site options.

Length of consultation

Minimum of 6 weeks.

Who should be invited to take part?

- Specific consultation bodies that the council considers may have an interest in the preparation of the local plan
- General consultation bodies the council think appropriate
- Residents or people carrying out business in the area the council considers appropriate
- Anyone who requested to be notified of this consultation

Post consultation

A summary of the outcomes of the consultation will be prepared. This will inform the content of the proposed local plan.

Consultation on the proposed local plan

(Regulation 27)

When?

This consultation stage takes place 'Gateway 2'.

Purpose

The purpose of this consultation is to publish the final proposed local plan. A map of proposed local plan policies and any evidence reports are also published, as well as any other supporting documents that will be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate.

Length of consultation

A minimum of 8 weeks.

Who should be invited to take part?

- Specific consultation bodies that the council considers may have an interest in the preparation of the local plan
- General consultation bodies the council think appropriate
- Residents or people carrying out business in the area the council considers appropriate
- Anyone who requested to be notified of this consultation

Post consultation

A summary of the outcomes of the consultation will be published. The council will make any updates necessary to the local plan and supporting evidence and will then move on to 'gateway 3', before submitting the local plan to the Planning Inspectorate for examination.

3.4. Engagement methods

A mix of methods can be used to enable engagement at each stage of consultation. The engagement will follow that outlined in the community engagement strategy, will be published following the scoping stage.

For each stage this will include:

- Publishing the consultation and questionnaire on a digital platform
- Inviting consultees to respond as set out under 'Who should be invited to take part'
- Publishing a notice on our website and at county hall

Other methods of engagement may include the following, which can be selected as appropriate depending on the consultation stage and content:

- Use of map based platforms
- Press releases
- Social media
- Digital storytelling
- Displaying information in libraries
- Public exhibitions or drop in events
- Engagement with Dorset Youth Council and other specific under-represented groups