



Statement of Community Involvement

COVID-19 Review June 2020

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1. Foreword

“There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about”

Margaret J. Wheatley

Sevenoaks District Council is a **Seriously Different Council**. We have the busiest planning department in Kent and we go above and beyond what we are required to do, in terms of community consultation and engagement. We have a culture of openness and transparency, where evidence base documents, consultation feedback and plan drafts are all considered through public committees. We have sought to engage with new technologies and automated processes to increase involvement and improve communication in planning. This has involved the increased use of social media platforms, text notifications and technologies such as interactive mapping tools and videos within planning consultations.

Community involvement and participation is key. Our aim is to improve opportunities for the community to get involved in shaping the planning policies in our District and to ensure that our residents have a greater sense of ownership in planning decisions and outcomes. Together we will help shape the District for future generations, ensuring that all groups in the community are able to engage in the planning process. This will also help to promote enhanced physical and mental well-being through people feeling a sense of place and connection to the District.



Councillor Julia Thornton
Portfolio Holder for Development and Conservation

2. Introduction

What is a Statement of Community Involvement?

- 2.1. Planning shapes the future of the places in which we live, work and play, and it is therefore important that all of our residents have the opportunity to engage with the process, through the formulation of local planning policy documents and decisions on planning applications.
- 2.2. Sevenoaks District Council wants to help people to get involved in planning the future of the District, and is driven to improving opportunities for engagement in planning processes.
- 2.3. This Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) has been produced to ensure that the Council is able to involve the local community effectively.
- 2.4. The previous SCI was adopted in November 2014. Since then there have been significant changes to the planning system, as well as the way in which the Council engages with local communities. This new version of the SCI has been revised to reflect the most up to date legislation and regulations.
- 2.5. The Council understands that in order to try to reach agreement within communities, people need to be involved from the early stages of the planning process. The SCI is therefore a public statement that lets communities and stakeholders know when and how they can be involved.

Why prepare a Statement of Community Involvement?

- 2.6. It is a key objective of the planning system to strengthen community and stakeholder involvement in the planning and development process. Planning affects all communities, so it is important that local people understand the process and are given the opportunity to get involved.
- 2.7. As set out in Regulation 10A of the Town and Country Planning Regulations 2012 (as amended), all local authorities are required to produce a SCI, which sets out their vision and strategy for effective community participation.
- 2.8. Greater community participation and empowerment is also high on the national agenda, as outlined in the Localism Act 2011 and the National Planning Policy Framework 2019 which states that the planning system should provide “a platform for local people to shape their surroundings” (paragraph 15).
- 2.9. Engaging communities early in the plan-making process should ensure that plans reflect the needs and aspirations of local people, and will allow communities to fully understand the process from start to finish.

2.10. Some of the benefits of community involvement include:

- Outcomes that better reflect local needs and aspirations;
- Improved quality and efficiency of decisions by drawing on local knowledge and minimising conflict;
- Education and communication amongst the community of different sectors' needs and the planning process;
- Promotion of social cohesion – making real connections with and between communities; and
- Enhanced buy-in and a greater sense of ownership for decisions and outcomes.

The Council Plan 2018

"We're a Seriously Different Council. This means going beyond the traditional remit of a district council by putting the wellbeing of our residents and businesses at the heart of everything we do.

Everything we do is built on...

Excellence – Outstanding services to all our residents and customers

Value for money – The highest quality for the best price

Innovation – Finding even better ways to deliver the services you need".



Corporate Linkages

- 2.11. The Council Plan 2018 (www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/councilplan) sets out that we are committed to the communities we serve, stating:

"We know that a great deal of what we already do makes a significant contribution to our residents' quality of life and sense of wellbeing. But we are ambitious for our communities and we want to do more".

It is important for us to keep our Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) up-to-date and relevant, in order to clarify how people can get involved in shaping local planning policy.

- 2.12. The Council also has its own policies and aims relating to community engagement and places a great deal of emphasis on ensuring that the community has the opportunity to get involved in all areas of Council work.
- 2.13. The Sevenoaks District Community Plan 'Making it Happen Together' was adopted in 2013 and creates a long-term vision (2013-2028) for the Sevenoaks District. The Sevenoaks District Community Plan Priorities presents the priorities for the next three years 2019-2022. Both documents are based on widespread consultation with local people and our partners.
- 2.14. The Community Plan is delivered by the Sevenoaks District Local Strategic Partnership. This is made up of public sector organisations, together with voluntary, community and faith sector representatives. It is coordinated by Sevenoaks District Council.
- 2.15. The Community Plan contains a number of themes and priorities for action that are required to successfully deliver the vision for the District. The Council's planning policy documents will build upon these objectives and will be the principal mechanism for delivering the land management elements of the Community Plan.
- 2.16. The SCI has been produced in accordance with these corporate policies, and all consultation activities will aim to meet their objectives. The Council will work with other departments to ensure that a consistent approach is taken to consultation on planning policy documents. Where appropriate, public consultations may also be linked with events and activities organised by other council departments and vice versa.

How can I get involved?

2.17. There are three main areas of planning that you can get involved in:

Area	Responsibility	Chapter
Strategic Planning (Local Plan)	Setting the policy framework against which planning applications will be assessed, including the Local Plan, Neighbourhood Plans, Conservation Areas and Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs).	See Chapter 3 for more information.
Development Management (Planning Applications and Trees)	Most types of development require a planning application to be submitted and approved, and anyone can comment on a planning application.	See Chapter 6 for more information
	Protecting trees and woodlands that offer amenity value.	See Chapter 8 for more information
Enforcement	Investigating alleged breaches of planning control	See Chapter 7 for more information

2.18. Planning applications are determined in accordance with the Local Plan, so it is essential to get involved with strategic planning policy as well as specific planning applications.

3. Community Involvement in Strategic Planning

The Planning System

- 3.1. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the Government's planning policies and how these should be applied. The Planning System requires local authorities to produce planning policy documents, which set out what, where and when development will occur in the District. Once formally adopted, these documents provide the basis on which planning applications are determined.
- 3.2. Planning legislation sets out which documents must be produced and which are optional. Regulations also exist to set out which of the documents must be developed with community input, and which must then be examined by an independent planning inspector.
- 3.3. There are two types of planning policy document: development plan documents (DPDs) and supplementary planning documents (SPDs). DPDs set out planning policies to manage land use within a local area, and SPDs provide further detail on the implementation of these policies. Together they form the Local Plan.
- 3.4. Further information regarding the Council's work programme for preparing planning policy documents is contained in the Local Development Scheme (LDS). The LDS is a timetable which lists the planning policy documents that the Council will produce, explaining how they will be prepared and when they will be published. Copies of the LDS are available from the Council's offices and website: www.sevenoaks.gov.uk (insert LDS in the search-box).
- 3.5. The Statement of Community Involvement will be used by the Council to guide the development of its planning policy and supporting documents.

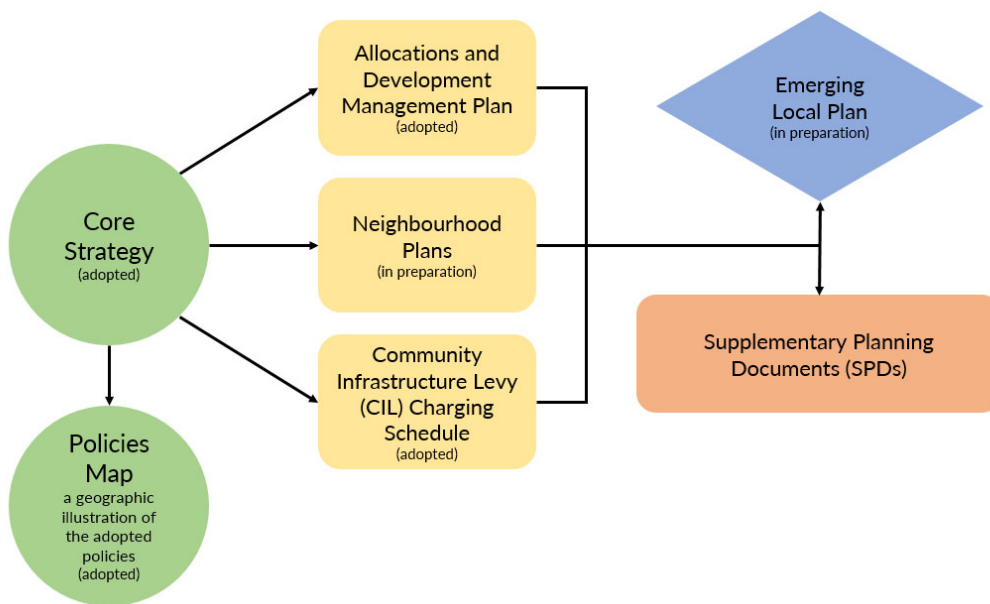
Planning Policy

National	National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2019
Local	Local Plan Other Development Plan Documents
Town and Parish	Neighbourhood Plans

- 3.6. Other supporting documents include:
 - Conservation area appraisals
 - Village Design Statements
 - Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs)

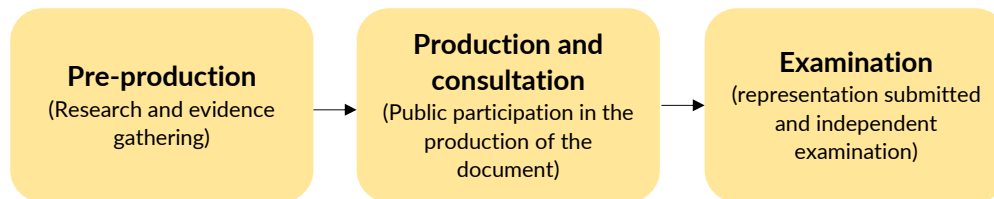
The Local Plan

- 3.7. The below diagram outlines the relationship between planning policy documents which will be, or have already been, produced.



Planning Policy Documents

- 3.8. The community will be involved throughout the different stages of production for each document prior to adoption, which can be summarised as follows:



- 3.9. [These regulations will be met wherever possible, and where the provision of hard copy documents is in line with national social distancing guidelines and government advice. SDC will undertake ongoing work to find alternative and innovative ways to publicise consultations.](#)

Deleted: The regulations require the Council to publicise consultations on the website and to provide documents for inspection at the Council's offices and local libraries, as well as sending emails and/or letters to statutory, general and other consultees.

- 3.10. The Council recognises the value of including more of the community in the development process – not least, that the documents will more closely reflect local needs and priorities. Therefore, there is a commitment by the Council to go

“above and beyond” the minimum requirements, to ensure active, widespread and effective community engagement in the planning process.

Stages of consultation for Development Plan Documents

- 3.11.** DPDs go through eight stages of plan making. The below table identifies what the Council will do at each stage, and how the community can get involved.

Number	Stage	What will the Council do?
Stage 1	Evidence Base	The Council collects up to date information on a range of social, economic and environmental matters.
Stage 2	Public participation in the preparation of a DPD (Regulation 18*)	<p>The results of stage 1 are used to identify the main issues that the plan needs to address and the options that are available. An assessment of the plan's social, economic and environmental impacts is also produced at this point, called a Sustainability Appraisal (SA). At this stage the Council is required to notify each of the statutory consultees that may have an interest in the proposal, and any appropriate general consultation bodies as to the subject of the proposed plan, and invite them to make representations. Local residents and businesses may also be informed and invited to comment. The Council maintains a consultation database of interested parties.</p> <p>The Council must take into account any representations received as a result of preparing the plan.</p> <p>The Council will undertake a public consultation for a minimum of six weeks. The Council will endeavour to run consultations for up to 8 weeks, where possible.</p>
Stage 3	Preparation of the DPD	The Council continues to develop the plan. This includes considering any comments from Stage 2 and the findings of any new studies.
Stage 4	Publications of the DPD (Regulation 19*)	<p>The Council publishes the final draft of the plan. A more detailed Sustainability Appraisal (SA), and a draft proposals map showing any changes that would result from the adoption of the plan are also published.</p> <p>The Council will undertake a public consultation for a minimum of six weeks.</p> <p>A statement of consultation will be produced, which provides a summary of the main issues raised by the representations. This allows Officers and District Councillors to review the representations and to consider what, if any, changes should be made to the plan before submission.</p>

Number	Stage	What will the Council do?
Stage 5	Consider Representations	The Council will consider any points raised in the consultation. If there are significant issues the Council may review the plan and return to Stage 3. Once all issues raised have been addressed, the plan can move to Stage 6.
Stage 6	Submission (Regulation 22*)	The Council will send the plan and any supporting documents to the Secretary of State to be examined. The Council will make all documents relating to Submission available to the public.
Stage 7	Examination (Regulation 24*)	An inspector appointed by the government will carry out an independent examination of the 'soundness' of the plan. Those who objected to the plan during Stage 4 may be allowed to appear in front of the inspector in person, at the discretion of the inspector.
Stage 8	Receipt of inspector's report and adoption (Regulations 25 and 26*)	The inspector writes a report of the examination and decides what changes (if any) need to be made. Once the Council receives the inspector's report the plan has to be changed in line with their recommendations, if the Council wishes to adopt it. It is this version of the plan that will be adopted.

* www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2012/767/contents/made

Regulation 18: Preparation of a local plan

Regulation 19: Publication of a local plan

Regulation 22: Submission of documents and information to the Secretary of State

Regulation 24: Independent examination

Regulation 25: Publication of the recommendations of the appointed person

Regulation 26: Adoption of a local plan

Stages of consultation for Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs)

- 3.12.** SPDs go through four stages of plan making. The below table identifies what the Council will do at each stage, and how the community can get involved.

Number	Stage	What will the Council do?
Stage 1	Development of evidence base	The Council collects up to date information on a range of social, economic and environmental matters.
Stage 2	Preparation of the draft SPD	The Council produces a draft version of the SPD based on the evidence collected at Stage 1.
Stage 3	Consultation on the draft SPD (Regulation 12*)	Once the draft document has been produced, the Council will undertake a public consultation for a minimum of six weeks Any representations made will be considered and amendments will be made to the document where required.
Stage 4	Adoption (Regulation 14*)	The Council will consider the revised document and councillors at Cabinet will adopt the SPD in line with regulation 14 requirements.

*<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2012/767/contents/made>

Regulation 12: Public participation

Regulation 14: Adoption of supplementary planning documents

4. Consultation methods

- 4.1. Since the publication of the last Statement of Community Involvement in 2014, the ways in which the Council engages with community have developed and improved. One of the main changes is the increased use of technology, both for consultation and notification purposes. Over the past year, the Council has increased its use of social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, to communicate with residents. Approximately 6,000 people now receive regular updates from the Council through these sites.
- 4.2. This is now especially important for ongoing consultation during the current COVID-19 outbreak. Previously used face-to-face consultation methods may now be unachievable as a result of UK social distancing guidelines and national government advice, and therefore there will be a larger focus on technological/virtual consultation methods.
- 4.3. A variety of methods will be used at various stages of the planning process, where these are in line with national government advice and social distancing guidelines, to engage community involvement in planning. These methods include, but are not limited to:

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Method	What will the Council do?
The Website	<p>All consultation activities will be publicised through the Council's website, on both the planning policy pages and the news page. The consultation portal will be available for people to read the documents and submit comments online.</p> <p>Where possible The Council will publish interactive forms of consultation, such as Interactive Maps and online questionnaires.</p>
Social Media (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram)	<p>All consultation events will be advertised on the Council's corporate Facebook and Twitter pages.</p> <p>Social Media will be used where possible to publish photos and videos in relation to planning matters, to keep residents informed and up to date.</p> <p>Social Media campaigns will be used where possible to inform hard to reach groups such as young people and commuters.</p>
Local newspapers	<p>Often, the Council will advertise in the local press. Advertisements will include details on when and where planning documents can be inspected, how copies can be obtained, the closing date for representations and where to send them. In addition, the Council often issues press releases at the time of consultations.</p>

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Method	What will the Council do?
Leaflets	<u>Leaflets, flyers, brochures and posters will be distributed, where appropriate, to Town and Parish Councils for display and dissemination within their administrative area. Where it is in line with national COVID-19 guidance, leaflets will also be distributed to other public areas such as libraries and train stations.</u>
Emails / letters	Notifications will be sent to statutory bodies, stakeholders, relevant groups and other individuals and organisations on the Council's consultation database, in line with the GDPR. Organisations and individuals interested in becoming more involved in preparation of planning policy documents should contact the Planning Policy team by phone on 01732 227000 or by email to planning.policy@sevenoaks.gov.uk to register on the consultation database.
Inspection points	<u>Documents will be made available for inspection at the Sevenoaks District Council offices, as well as Town and Parish Council offices and local libraries, where possible and when in line with national social distancing guidelines and government advice. All consultation documents are made available for view and download at www.sevenoaks.gov.uk</u>
Presentations	<u>The use of virtual applications such as Skype, Microsoft Teams and Zoom will be utilised, where necessary, to ensure effective communication with organisations and stakeholders throughout consultation periods.</u>
Questionnaires / Surveys	Use of questionnaires, surveys and/or focus groups to determine attitudes towards particular issues and options. Such research can target groups and individuals with particular interests or citizens panels with multiple interests.
Public exhibitions / displays / roadshows	For larger consultations, the Council may promote events at a public exhibition, display or a roadshow, during the day and in the evening. This has the ability to target members of the community who may not get involved through more formal methods. These include, but are not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Town and Parish Council forums. - Agents/Developers Forum - Interest Group Forums - Family Fun Days - School Presentations - Drop-in Events - Commuter engagement at railway stations

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¶ Leaflets will be distributed in various places around the District, such as Libraries, Town and Parish Council Offices and Train Stations, as appropriate.

Deleted: Documents will be made available for inspection at the Council's offices, Town and Parish Council offices and local libraries, where appropriate.

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Method	What will the Council do?
	The above events may be carried out virtually, or where the relevant social distancing guideline and national government advice is able to be followed and adhered to safely.
Interactive workshops	<p>Use of interactive workshops to identify and focus discussion around difficult issues and key themes. These can reach people who might not get involved in more formal groups but who may respond to this kind of contact, for example Placemaking, Drop in Sessions or an Interest Group Forums</p> <p>Where this is not achievable due to social distancing guidelines and government advice, every effort will be made by the Council for these to be carried out in a virtual and interactive format.</p>
Community / resident meetings and groups	<p>Use of pre-existing community/resident meetings and meetings of community groups to target people with particular characteristics/interests, for example Drop-in Sessions and Interest Group Forums, in conjunction with the Council's Communities team.</p> <p>Attendance from Planning Officers may depend on national social distancing guidelines and government advice. Where appropriate, every effort will be made for meetings to take place virtually.</p>
Council meetings	<p>Where appropriate, documents will be taken to relevant council meetings (below) for feedback from District Councillors.</p> <p>DCAC – Development and Conservation Advisory Committee DCC – Development Control Committee Cabinet Full Council</p>
Contacting the Planning Department	Throughout any Planning Consultation, planning officers are contactable by both phone on 01732 227000 or by email at planning.information@sevenoaks.gov.uk / planning.policy@sevenoaks.gov.uk.

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5. Communicating Effectively

Who the Council consults

- 5.1. The planning regulations require local authorities to meet a minimum level of community involvement and specify a number of organisations which must be consulted if it is considered that they will be affected, known as statutory consultees and general consultation bodies.
- 5.2. In addition to meeting statutory obligations, the Council is committed to ensuring that local groups, organisations and individuals are given the best possible opportunity to become involved in the preparation of planning policy documents.
- 5.3. The Council maintains a consultation database of approximately 10,000 consultees who have either commented on, or expressed an interest in being involved with, the production of planning policy documents. This database is used to keep registered individuals, organisations and groups informed on the production of any planning policy documents and complies fully with the GDPR. New consultees can be added to the consultation database as requested, organisations and individuals interested in registering on the consultation database should contact the Planning Policy team by phone on 01732 227000 or by email to planning.policy@sevenoaks.gov.uk.
- 5.4. The Council will continue to consult with elected Members of the District Council, as well as, wherever possible, Members of Parliament for the District, and seek their input into the preparation of planning policy documents.
- 5.5. Where possible, the Council will take further action to encourage involvement in the planning process from hard to reach groups, such as Young People, the Gypsy and Traveller Community and Commuters.
- 5.6. A list of statutory consultees, general consultation bodies and other organisations and groups the Council involves in the plan making process are included at Appendix B, C and D.

Sustainability Appraisal

- 5.7. Local planning authorities must undertake a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) of each of the DPDs they produce, in accordance with the legislation.
- 5.8. A Sustainability Appraisal aims to ensure that the policies and proposals reflect the principles of sustainable development. A Sustainability Appraisal will be undertaken whilst preparing each stage of a DPD and a report will be consulted on through the plan making process, at the same time as the DPD itself, in accordance with the legislation.

5.9. A Sustainability Appraisal is not required for SPDs.

Feeding information into decisions

5.10. The information that the Council obtains through community involvement will be collated and used to inform the decisions made and/or to shape any documents that are produced.

5.11. A summary of the responses will be produced, showing how they were used to inform decisions or documents, and providing an indication of the resulting outcomes.

5.12. This will be made available on the Council's website

Feeding back

5.13. Each planning policy document will require a 'statement of consultation'. This will outline how the Statement of Community Involvement has been followed and how doing so has benefited document production. This will provide some indication of the benefits of involvement.

5.14. The Council will make all general feedback and summary outcomes available on the website and from the Council's offices on request.

5.15. In addition, the Council aims to feed back directly to those involved in either specific involvement activities such as workshops, or consultation processes associated with planning policy documents.

The Council's feedback commitment

The Council aims to provide feedback on any involvement activities or consultation processes associated with local plan development.

At a minimum, the feedback will include:

1. An acknowledgement of your comments;
2. A summary of how the process is going; and
3. How your information will be used.

When applicable and/or possible the Council will also:

1. Summarise the key information received;
2. Outline the decision made and why; and
3. Outline the benefits provided by community involvement.

Acknowledgments will generally be provided by email and summaries/updates will be made available on the Council's website.

6. Community Involvement in Development Management

- 6.1. The Statement of Community Involvement also outlines how the community will be involved in planning applications.
- 6.2. The Council is already required to consult with the community on all planning applications submitted. The table at paragraph 6.33 (page 22) sets out the legal minimum action that must be taken to provide you with an opportunity to put forward your views or concerns.
- 6.3. However, the Council recognises that, in some cases, it will be beneficial and appropriate to involve more people and/or involve them earlier in the process.

Greater community involvement

- 6.4. Involving people before an application is made allows them to influence developments as they are being designed, helping to deal with issues that may become major issues later.
- 6.5. For each stage of the planning application process, and for the different types of application, the Council will consider whether greater involvement is appropriate and how it can support developers in involving people more effectively.
- 6.6. The NPPF states that “Early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties. Good quality pre-application discussion enables better coordination between public and private resources and improved outcomes for the community” (Paragraph 39).

General advice and assistance

- 6.7. A wealth of information on the Council's development management functions including validation requirements can be obtained on the website: www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/planning
- 6.8. The Planning Portal is an online planning, appeals and building regulations resource for England and Wales and also provides advice and services for the public and professionals: www.planningportal.co.uk.
- 6.9. Additionally, Planning Aid England provides free, independent and professional planning advice to communities and individuals who cannot afford to pay professional fees. This service encourages people to become involved in the planning system. Please visit www.rtpi.org.uk and search for 'Planning Aid'.

Permitted Development

- 6.10. In certain circumstances you can carry out minor extensions and alterations to your property without the need to apply for planning permission. This is known as permitted development and is derived from a general planning permission granted by Parliament.
- 6.11. Permitted development applies to many common projects for houses, but bear in mind that it does not apply to flats, maisonettes or other buildings. In these circumstances, a planning application will need to be submitted.
- 6.12. To check if your proposed works are covered by permitted development, the Council encourages all prospective applicants to view the interactive house guide, provided by the Planning portal: www.planningportal.co.uk.
- 6.13. If you wish for the Council to confirm in writing whether or not planning permission is required for your proposals, you should submit an application for a Certificate of Lawful Development (LDC).

Pre-application Advice

- 6.14. The Council encourages prospective applicants to consult at an early stage on potential developments before details are finalised. Consistent with the NPPF, the Council believes that early engagement with the local community offers potential benefit for all parties.
- 6.15. Pre-application advice is of benefit to prospective applicants as:
 - It gives an opportunity to understand how council policies will be applied to a development and potential issues can be identified and resolved before an application is submitted.
 - It may lead to a reduction in time spent working up the proposals in more detail; and
 - It can identify at an early stage whether any specialist advice is necessary (e.g. listed buildings, trees, landscape, transport, ecology or archaeology).
- 6.16. Charges apply to requests for pre-application advice and these seek to cover some of the Council's costs of providing the service.
- 6.17. When a pre-application enquiry is submitted, the Council will:
 - Register the enquiry, allocate a Planning Officer and write to confirm the timescales within five working days;
 - Identify the main constraints;
 - Identify key planning policies;

- Identify recent history;
- Give a view on the principle of the development;
- Inform the customer of the issues that will need to be addressed as part of a formal application; and
- Identify any further studies or information that will be required to provide a more detailed pre-application view or that will be required as part of a formal planning application.

6.18. The Council can give advice that can help in the preparation of a better planning application so that it can be processed more quickly and a decision can be made sooner. It is also valuable in assuring the best possible development outcomes for the community. Where relevant the Council can also give advice on effective ways of consulting with the local community, including neighbours who may be affected by development proposals.

6.19. However, it should be noted that any advice given by Council Officers for pre-application enquiries does not constitute a formal response or decision of the Council with regards to a future planning application.

6.20. For further information please see the website: www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/planning

6.21. In addition to pre-application advice, the Council encourages prospective applicants to discuss their proposals with the local Town or Parish Council and the local District Councillor in order to ascertain their views and an early stage.



How Planning Applications are decided

- 6.22. Applications submitted to the Council are registered and acknowledged by the Validation team. They aim to complete the process within five working days of receipt.
- 6.23. Once an application is accepted as valid it is recorded on the planning register that the Council is required to maintain and make available for inspection, and is available on the website via the Public Access portal:
<http://pa.sevenoaks.gov.uk/online-applications>. It is possible to register for updates on the progress of applications, track specific applications and submit comments.
- 6.24. A weekly list of planning applications received is sent electronically to the local press, District Councillors, Town and Parish Councils, amenity societies and anyone else who requests a copy. Requests can be made to:
planning.validation@sevenoaks.gov.uk.
- 6.25. Applications are advertised in the local press and on site if they are major developments, affect a listed building, a conservation area, are not in accordance with the adopted Local Plan, have a substantial impact on the area or if they affect a public right of way.
- 6.26. Notification letters are sent to immediate neighbours and may be sent to others who are invited to comment.
- 6.27. The statutory consultation period is 21 days. An application cannot be determined until this period has expired.
- 6.28. The Council aims to determine major planning applications within thirteen weeks and other planning applications within eight weeks.
- 6.29. Most planning applications are determined by the Chief Planning Officer under delegated powers. However, any application may be called to the Development Control Committee by a District Councillor if the Officer recommendation is contrary to the view of the Parish Council. District Councillors also have a general power to call an application to Committee before the overall expiration of the date for comments to be submitted. Applications of a significant controversial or sensitive nature may also be referred to the Committee by the Chief Planning Officer.
- 6.30. In cases where applications are reported to the Development Control Committee, the Planning Officer prepares a report for the Committee that outlines the proposal, sets out consultation replies, assesses the relevant issues and makes a recommendation regarding whether approval should be given.

- 6.31. Any person who comments on the proposal will be notified when an application is to be reported to Committee for determination, and there is an opportunity for an objector and a supporter of the proposal to put their views directly to the Committee. Applicants and objectors will be able to address Councillors for a maximum of three minutes speaking time. The relevant Town or Parish Council and the local District Councillor may also speak.
- 6.32. For further information please see the leaflet "Speaking on Planning Applications" available on the website www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/developmentcontrolcommittee



- 6.33. The below table outlines the planning application process stage by stage, from pre-application discussions through to determination.

Stage	What will the Council do?
Pre-Application	<p>The Council will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage developers to contact the Planning team early on. • Encourage applicants, especially of larger schemes, to engage with the relevant Town/Parish Council, District Councillors, service providers and local groups as early as possible. • For smaller applications, encourage applicants to discuss their plans with neighbours before submitting a large application. • Encourage owners of larger sites to prepare management plans for their land and submit them to the Council.

Stage	What will the Council do?
Application	<p>As a minimum, the Council will:</p> <p>For all developments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Display a (orange) site notice for 21 days and/or • Write directly to any adjoining owners or occupiers giving 21 days to make comments. • Depending on the nature of the application, consult with appropriate statutory consultees, Town/Parish Councils and District Councillors. • Additional requirements apply to applications involving listed buildings, conservation areas or environmental impact assessments. • Where a mobile number is provided, text message notifications will be sent to the applicant/agent to keep them informed on the progress of the application. <p>For major developments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In addition to the above, place an advertisement in the local newspaper.
	<p>Additionally, the Council will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notify immediate neighbours on every planning application. • Notify others that the Council considers may be affected by individual cases. • Allocate a case officer who will liaise with all stakeholders and attend a site visit. where this is in line with national social distancing guidelines and government advice. • If an application is substantially amended prior to a decision, the Council will re-consult all those who have expressed an interest in writing.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You will be able to track the progress of planning applications through Public Access, available on the website.

Stage	What will the Council do?
Decision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If applications are taken to Committee (which are public meetings, open to all) for decision, applicants and objectors will be able to address Councillors (3 minutes speaking time). • Everyone who responds in writing to an application will be informed in writing of the decision. • Decision notices will be posted on the website. • Any concerns about applications that may not have been implemented as agreed should be notified to the Council's Enforcement team for investigation. • Any legal (Section 106 or 278 highways) agreement attached to a planning permission will be available for viewing through Public Access, available on the website.



7. Planning Enforcement

- 7.1. The Enforcement team is responsible for investigation alleged breaches of planning control, including unauthorised works to listed buildings, unlawful advertisements, works to protected trees and developments carried out without the necessary planning permission.
- 7.2. The Council's approach to enforcement is based on the following principles:
- Where a new complaint is received we will aim to visit the site in accordance with the timetable set out in our Enforcement Plan, which is available on our website: www.sevenoaks.gov.uk
 - We will prioritise the investigation of complaints based on the degree of harm caused by unauthorised development.
 - We will seek to achieve solutions that remove harm caused by unauthorised development.
 - We will use our statutory powers where necessary and proportionate to remove harmful development.
 - Complainants and those who are the subject of complaints will be kept informed of the progress of enforcement investigations and of the outcome.
 - The identity of complainants will be kept confidential.
- 7.3. Further information about Enforcement priorities and principles are provided on the website and the Council is currently updating the Local Enforcement Plan.

8. Tree Preservation Orders

- 8.1. Legislation is in place to afford protection to a percentage of those trees and woodlands that offer amenity value. The legislation is in the form of 42 Conservation Areas throughout the District and Tree Preservation Orders, of which there are currently in excess of 1000.
- 8.2. Sevenoaks District has many trees comprising of a range of diverse species and 11% of the District is classified as ancient woodland. The Council continues to assess and protect, where necessary, this rich biological inheritance for the people of the District today and tomorrow.
- 8.3. To help us balance the management of trees, the Council welcomes the help of local residents. This could include suggestions to protect certain important trees that you feel may be under threat or informing the Council about work to a protected tree that may be carried out without consent. For further information see the website: www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/trees.



9. Overcoming Barriers

9.1. The Council has identified several different, but connected, barriers to involvement. These include:

- Apathy and disinterest;
- Time (of meetings/activities to get involved);
- Mistrust and cynicism that it's worthwhile; and
- Ability to access and understand information.

9.2. The Council's approach to involving people will seek to overcome these barriers by...

...connecting people to planning

9.3. One of the Council's key priorities is to provide everyone with the opportunity to know what is going on and how they can get involved if they want to. To support this, the Council aims to provide information that is local and relevant and use methods of involvement that are accessible, interesting and, where appropriate, fun.

9.4. Alongside the specific involvement activities, the Council is committed to raising awareness of the planning system throughout the community. With this in mind, the Council is committed to placing more emphasis on going out into local communities to discover your needs and aspirations.

...seeking more active involvement

9.5. Although this document sets out the different levels and methods of involvement, it is the Council's aim to involve more people more actively if resources are available.

9.6. The Council will ask the community about their aspirations for the area and expectations for the future. This will help to generate ideas and scope particular documents.

...meeting everyone's needs

9.7. In line with the Equality Act (2010) and the West Kent Equality Partnership aims and commitments, the Council wants to ensure that all communities have the ability to respond to consultations and have their voices heard. The Council aims to pay particular regard to the needs of different ethnicity and disability groups. Documents are produced in different formats (e.g. large print and can be explained in other languages) where a need is identified and access arrangements are considered when organising involvement events.

- 9.8. Whilst the Council aims to increase participation from all sectors of the community, it is recognised that some groups are harder to engage with than others. These hard to reach groups include rural communities, commuters, Gypsies and Travellers, Young People and those with lower literacy or language barriers.
- 9.9. To help improve representation and participation the Council will strengthen relationships with other Council departments, education establishments and community development organisations to learn from their experience, gain a better understanding of the needs of particular groups and ensure that the needs of all sectors of the community are met.

Review

- 9.10. The Council is committed to reviewing and amending the methods and level of engagement with the community in response to ongoing feedback on the effectiveness of the community engagement undertaken.
- 9.11. The Council is actively seeking new and innovative ways to communicate and engage with the community.

10. Appendix A – Implementing Consultation Methods

10.1. The Council recognises that there are different levels of interaction between the Planning team and the community:

- **Notification** – providing information, for example through text messages, leaflets, email and post, advertising and ongoing awareness programmes.
- **Consultation** – consulting you on your views, for example through surveys, interactive maps and portals, exhibitions and formal consultation processes.
- **Participation** – such as in workshops where you would be actively involved in identifying needs and priorities

10.2. The Council recognises the community's expectation that everyone receives information and has an opportunity to participate and comment. However, where documents relate to a specific area or issue – such as a Neighbourhood Plan for a defined parish area – only organisations and individuals with specific relevance to this area or issue would be more actively involved.

10.3. The below table shows how you could be involved, for which documents and when in the process.

Method of Involvement	This is useful for...	Which document	What stage	For which sectors of the community?	Things the Council need to consider	Resource intensity
Electronic resources (internet, email, online consultation, interactive map)	Allowing access to the latest information about progress and opportunities to contribute	All DPDs / SPDs / planning applications / reporting issues to enforcement	All Stages	All sectors	Electronic resources must be user friendly and intuitive. Items should be placed online in time for people to response effectively.	Low – initially specialist skills will be required, but posting information online is low/no cost once established.

Method of Involvement	This is useful for...	Which document	What stage	For which sectors of the community?	Things the Council need to consider	Resource intensity
Social Media (Twitter, Facebook and Instagram)	Promoting and informing the community of consultations and opportunity for engagement	All DPDs / SPDs	All Stages	All sectors	Social Media posts must be user friendly and intuitive. Items should be placed online in time for people to respond effectively.	Low – use of existing social media channels, posting information online is low/no cost once established.
Local media (newspaper adverts and articles, newsletters, flyers, TV, radio)	Raising levels of awareness and publicising specific opportunities to get involved, reaching a wide audience.	All DPDs / SPDs	All stages	Local communities, developers and landowners, business sector, service providers	Information must be interesting and relevant. The Council needs to allow enough time for publication and set an appropriate timeframe for collecting responses.	Medium – whilst advertising in the local press can be free, broader advertising can be expensive.
Publicity in community centres (e.g. libraries,	Going out into the community to provide information and access views,	All DPDs / SPDs	All stages	Local communities	Information should be accessible to all in terms of mobility,	Medium – production of material can involve Significant

Method of Involvement	This is useful for...	Which document	What stage	For which sectors of the community?	Things the Council need to consider	Resource intensity
shopping and sports centres)	reaching those who would not normally seek to be involved.				understanding and times available The Council will need to consider current and up to date social distancing guidelines and national government advice.	costs. Staff time will also be needed.
Letter based consultation to people and organisations listed on the consultation database	Providing information specific to identified organisations and those requesting general updates on the local plan process.	All DPDs / SPDs	All stages	All those requesting to be added to the consultation database and statutory consultees	Must be clear and understandable, although most people on this list will have a good understanding of the planning system.	Low – supplementary to other consultation methods, re-using that information, but postage may be costly.

Method of Involvement	This is useful for...	Which document	What stage	For which sectors of the community?	Things the Council need to consider	Resource intensity
Documents available for inspection at local council offices	Meeting minimum requirements in allowing everyone the opportunity to comment on draft documents	All DPDs / SPDs	All stages	Local communities, developers and landowners, business sector, service providers, additional authorities	<p>It must be clear how and when people should respond. Information should be accessible to all in terms of mobility, understanding and times available.</p> <p>The Council will need to consider current and up to date social distancing guidelines and national government advice.</p>	Low – staff time may be needed to answer questions and collate any responses

Method of Involvement	This is useful for...	Which document	What stage	For which sectors of the community?	Things the Council need to consider	Resource intensity
Area/town forums and Town/Parish Council meetings	Reaching community groups through existing forums dealing with local issues. Gaining first hand views regarding a specific area.	DPDs	Pre-production, production and submission	Local communities, developers and landowners, business sector, service providers	<p>The Council must be aware of the audience and any restrictions. The Council should also consider the time available for consultation on the local plan (alongside other agenda items).</p> <p>The Council will need to consider current and up to date social distancing guidelines and national government advice.</p>	Medium – attending existing forums requires staff time to attend meetings and to prepare any material.
Qualitative research (e.g. questionnaire surveys)	Determining attitudes and identifying needs for improvement.	DPDs	Pre-production, production and submission	All sectors	Surveys can reap a greater number of responses but require	Medium/high – specialist skills are required. Depending on scope, costs of

Method of Involvement	This is useful for...	Which document	What stage	For which sectors of the community?	Things the Council need to consider	Resource intensity
	Gaining views from people who would not otherwise express an opinion				significant administration. Focus groups require specialist skills but can be used to target specific groups	venue hire or distributing surveys can be significant.
Public exhibitions	Outlining specific plans and proposals to target audience. Accessible to broad audience.	DPDs	Production and submission	Local communities, developers and landowners, business sector, service providers, additional authorities	Information should be accessible to all in terms of mobility, understanding and times available. The Council will need to consider current and up to date social distancing guidelines and national government advice.	Medium – preparation costs and time needed can be significant. Additional staff time is needed if manned.
Preparation of locally based	Locally prepared by the	Neighbourhood plans etc	All stages	Local communities	These outline community	Low/medium – the Council

Method of Involvement	This is useful for...	Which document	What stage	For which sectors of the community?	Things the Council need to consider	Resource intensity
documents (e.g. neighbourhood plans, parish plans and village design statements.	community as their aspirations. Provides the Council with information on what the community wants with the Council playing a supporting role in the process				priorities and may differ from place to place. The Local Plan needs to be flexible enough to respond to this challenge	offers support for communities developing these documents, which can be intensive, although using the documents for background is low.
Participation workshops	Bringing together representatives from different sectors of the community to be more actively involved in scoping documents and identifying priorities.	DPDs	Pre-production, production and submission	All sectors	Events require significant preparation and organisation. However they can be very useful for discussing important and/or difficult issues. The Council will need to consider current and up to date	Medium/high – time is needed for preparation, specialist skills may be required. The costs of venue hire can be considerable.

Method of Involvement	This is useful for...	Which document	What stage	For which sectors of the community?	Things the Council need to consider	Resource intensity
					social distancing guidelines and national government advice.	
Working groups / focus groups / panels	Bringing together representatives to provide ongoing support to local plan development and production	DPDs	Pre-production, production and submission	All sectors	Success is dependent on commitment from those involved. Regular or ongoing meetings can also have resource complications	Medium – ongoing support from staff has time implications. There are also costs in organising meetings

11. Appendix B – Statutory Consultation Bodies

11.1. The statutory consultee (specific consultation bodies) that the regulations require the Council to consult are:

- The Environment Agency
- English Heritage
- Natural England
- The Mayor of London
- The Civil Aviation Authority
- Homes and Communities Agency
- Primary Care Trust
- Office of Rail Regulation
- Transport for London
- Integrated Transport Authority
- Kent County Council Highways (as the Highways Authority)
- Marine Management Organisation

12. Appendix C – General Consultation Bodies

12.1. The general consultees (general consultation bodies) that the regulations require the Council to consult, where appropriate, are:

- Voluntary bodies
- Bodies which represent the interests of different racial, ethnic or national groups
- Bodies which represent the interests of different religious groups
- Bodies which represent the interests of disabled persons
- Bodies which represent the interests of persons carrying on business

12.2. For Sevenoaks, these bodies include, but are not limited to:

Group	Including...
Local communities	Individual residents Residents associations Community groups (interest, activity and belief) Community forums Town partnerships Local strategic partnerships Community development organisations The National Farmers Union (NFU) Other organisations for specific community groups (e.g. youth, women)
Agencies	Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) Kent Rural Community Council Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) Sport England

Group	Including...
	<p>Health and Safety Executive</p> <p>Network Rail</p> <p>Passenger Transport Authorities and Executives</p> <p>Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Units</p> <p>Environmental, Heritage and Wildlife organisations</p> <p>National Playing Fields Association</p> <p>Age Concern / Help the Aged</p> <p>Sure Start</p> <p>Equal Opportunities Commission</p> <p>Voluntary organisations</p> <p>Other bodies which represent the interest of different groups within the community (e.g. racial, ethnic, religious, disability)</p>
Service Providers	<p>Health trusts</p> <p>Health Services</p> <p>Kent Fire and Rescue</p> <p>Kent Ambulance NHS Trust</p> <p>Transport providers (road, rail, air, water)</p> <p>Education establishments (state and private)</p> <p>Utilities Providers</p> <p>Sports organisations</p>
Business sector	<p>Chambers of commerce</p> <p>Town and shopping centre management</p>

Group	Including...
	Business, trade and industry associations / federations Economic development organisations Employment organisations
Developers and landowners	Registered social landlords (RSLs) Crown estates Defence estates The Home Builders Federation (HBF) National Trust Post Office Property Holdings Individual developers Development and building companies Regeneration organisations

13. Appendix D – Other Consultees

13.1. The Town and Parish Councils in Sevenoaks District that the regulations require the Council to consult, where appropriate, are:

- Ash-cum-Ridley Parish Council
- Badgers Mount Parish Council
- Brasted Parish Council
- Chevening Parish Council
- Chiddingstone Parish Council
- Cowden Parish Council
- Crockenhill Parish Council
- Dunton Green Parish Council
- Edenbridge Town Council
- Eynsford Parish Council
- Farningham Parish Council
- Fawkham Parish Council
- Halstead Parish Council
- Hartley Parish Council
- Hever Parish Council
- Hextable Parish Council
- Horton Kirby & South Darenth Parish Council
- Kemsing Parish Council
- Knockholt Parish Council
- Leigh Parish Council
- Otford Parish Council
- Penshurst Parish Council
- Riverhead Parish Council
- Seal Parish Council
- Sevenoaks Town Council
- Sevenoaks Weald Parish Council
- Shoreham Parish Council
- Sundridge with Ide Hill Parish Council
- Swanley Town Council
- Westerham Town Council
- West Kingsdown Parish Council

13.2. The Neighbouring Authorities that the regulations require the Council to consult, where appropriate, are:

- Dartford Borough Council
- Gravesham Borough Council
- London Borough of Bexley
- London Borough of Bromley

- Tandridge District Council
- Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council
- Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
- Wealden District Council
- Kent County Council
- Surrey County Council
- East Sussex County Council
- The Greater London Authority