



# **West Lancashire Statement of Community Involvement**

## **Addendum**

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Application of the Addendum

The Addendum to the West Lancashire Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) 2020 has been prepared in the light of COVID-19 and its associated restrictions on public life. It reflects [temporary or otherwise] changes to legislation and national planning practice guidance, and other government guidance, and will apply for a temporary period whilst the COVID-19 related restrictions and changes are in place.

As such, the provisions of the 2020 SCI Addendum take precedence over the provisions of the 2020 SCI during the temporary period that the Addendum is in force. Once COVID-19 related restrictions are 'lifted', it is anticipated that the Council will revert to the 'usual' 2020 SCI principles and standards. (It is accepted, however, that some things have already changed for good as a result of COVID-19.)

This Addendum can also have effect if other similar restrictions on public life and interaction are imposed in the near future (e.g. as a result of a further wave(s) of COVID-19 / a local 'flare-up' of the disease accompanied by localised 'lockdown' / a different disease or a mutated form of the COVID-19 virus).

Similarly, if central government introduces new legislation, regulations, instructions or guidelines in the near future, these shall be borne in mind alongside the provisions of this 2020 SCI Addendum. Whilst this Addendum reflects guidance, etc. in effect at the time of writing, the continuous changes and unprecedented circumstances mean that requirements are likely to evolve. The Council will continue to ensure that we follow, and accord with, the most up to date guidance and best practice.

## 1.2 Principles of Consultation

The overarching principle behind consultation undertaken by West Lancashire Borough Council, whether under the 'normal' SCI, or under this Addendum, is that the Council wants to consult in a fair and equitable way, giving all people opportunities to see planning documents, to comment on them, and to influence the final documents and / or planning decisions.

Whilst the restrictions associated with COVID-19 mean that consultation methods undertaken over recent years are not presently possible (for example the placing of paper documents 'on deposit' at different venues, and face-to-face meetings), the Council will endeavour to use other methods to enable people to see and comment on documents. This Addendum highlights what we are currently unable to do, but does not limit us in terms of what we *could* do.

### 1.3 Effects of COVID-19 Restrictions

The effects of COVID-19 on public movement and interaction are widely known and include:

- Venues such as libraries, the Council's Customer Service Point / 52 Derby Street Reception have been shut for prolonged periods, or reopened subject to constraints;
- Even once open again, it is unlikely people would be able to come into such buildings and spend any substantial time indoors, touching and reading paper documents that others have touched / will touch. Copies of documents could perhaps be provided on a 'rotation' basis with a 72 hours 'quarantine' between views, but even this measure would only allow for a small number of people to view documents.
- Public meetings and face-to-face meetings are either not possible or are impracticable.

### 1.4 Responses to COVID-19

Central and local government and the public have responded to the crisis in a variety of ways:

- Legislative changes –
  - > The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 – these allow for 'virtual' public body meetings;
  - > The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 – these temporarily remove the requirement to make paper copies of planning documents available 'on deposit'.
- Changes to national Planning Practice Guidance – new paragraphs<sup>1</sup> (May / July 2020) set out how local authorities can consider:
  - > making temporary amendments to SCIs to allow plan-making to progress;
  - > promoting effective community engagement by means which are reasonably practicable. They are strongly encouraged to use online engagement methods to their full potential; for example virtual exhibitions, digital consultations, video conferencing, social media and providing documents for inspection on a public website;
  - > taking reasonable alternative and creative steps to ensure those without internet access are still involved, for example consulting through representative groups rather than directly targeting only people in areas most affected by proposals, and allowing individuals to nominate an advocate to share views on their behalf;
  - > consulting by telephone or in writing where this is feasible, and the only option;

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<sup>1</sup> Paragraphs 61-077-201200513, 61-078-201200513, 61-079-20200715

- Local authorities, including West Lancashire Borough Council, setting up 'virtual' (online) committee meetings, for example Planning Committee, Cabinet and Council, as well as extending consultation periods (e.g. on the Draft 2020 West Lancashire SCI).
- An increase in home working; it is anticipated that home working will continue to feature once COVID-19 restrictions are no longer in place.
- More people have learned to use the internet and / or have undertaken more tasks online, for example home shopping, and online meetings using such 'online conferencing' software as 'Zoom' or 'Teams', etc.

## **2 Changes to Planning Consultation Methods**

In the light of the above, and in the context of a corporate push to greater use of 'digital means of consultation', the following changes will be made under this Addendum to planning consultation and engagements methods:

### **2.1 Preparation of Planning Policy Documents**

During consultation periods, the Council is unlikely to be placing paper copies of planning documents on deposit for people to inspect. If this option is pursued, the documents will only be accessible to a small number of people, owing to the need to clean facilities after visits, and to 'quarantine' documents after use. Instead, the primary way of making documents available will be online. Documents may be provided by post upon request, and where appropriate explanation can be provided as to why a person cannot access the document online (although the Council is unlikely to be able to respond to 'blanket' requests for several hundred paper copies of documents).

Whilst, in theory, a small number of people could meet to discuss draft documents or proposals, Council representatives will not be able to attend multiple meetings with different groups of people. Given it would only be possible to meet a handful of people in total in this way, face-to-face meetings are not currently being pursued as an option. Similarly, events like exhibitions are not currently deemed appropriate due to the number of people that may attend with the accompanied risk of spreading the virus.

However, the Council will endeavour to engage with people in other ways, for example through such means as virtual meetings, conference / video calls, social media, and online 'chat'. The Council will be open to suggestions for innovative and practicable new ways of consultation.

## **2.2 Community Infrastructure Levy**

Consultation on the 2021/22 CIL Funding Programme will be based online and will comprise:

- Information on the Council's CIL webpages and consultation webpages;
- Emails to all consultees registered on the Council's 'electronic' consultation database, to all Parish Councils and Members, and to all infrastructure providers;
- Press release / publicity through Council's social media;
- An electronic online response form to complete;
- An advertisement in the Champion newspaper;

## **2.3 Development Management**

The Development Management Team is reviewing precise procedures to cope with ever changing COVID-19 circumstances.

Planning Committee has been meeting virtually. People wishing to speak at Planning Committee, if eligible to speak, will be invited to telephone into the meeting. The meetings are webcast and the link to the meetings are provided on the Committee agenda.

Meetings with officers, for example as part of planning applications or pre-application enquiries, are carried out via Skype or video conferencing, or a conference call.

With regards to consultations on planning applications, the way the Council consults with consultees or neighbours (consultees via email, and neighbours by letter) has not changed in the light of COVID-19. The Council is still accepting paper representations from neighbours in addition to electronic and online responses.

However, at the time of writing this Addendum, people have not been able to come to 52 Derby Street Reception or the Customer Service Point at Skelmersdale to view planning applications on Council computers.