



West Oxfordshire Statement of Community Involvement (July 2014)

Contents

1. Introduction	2
What is the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)?.....	2
2. Planning Policy Documents.....	4
Who we consult.....	8
When we consult.....	9
How we consult.....	10
How to comment	16
How decisions are made.....	16
3. Planning Applications.....	17
Finding out about a planning application.....	17
How to comment on a planning application.....	19
How planning applications are decided.....	20
Pre-application engagement.....	20
4. Resources and Review.....	22
Resources	22
Review	22
Appendix 1: Links to other Community Involvement Initiatives	23
Appendix 2: Summary of Consultees.....	24
Appendix 3: Methods of Community Involvement	26
Appendix 4: Jargon Buster.....	28

I. Introduction

What is the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)?

- I.1 The SCI sets out the ways the local community can get involved in the future development of West Oxfordshire.
- I.2 The Council's first SCI was adopted in 2007. Recent changes to the planning system mean the SCI needs to be amended. This provides an opportunity to ensure that the SCI reflects new planning policy documents that are going to be produced and also to take advantage of new means of community engagement, such as social media.
- I.3 There are minimum national requirements for involving the local community in planning decisions. These are set out in this statement, along with how and when the Council will seek to exceed them.
- I.4 The aim is to provide the opportunity for everyone in the local community (people and organisations who live or work in West Oxfordshire) to be involved in the planning process if they so wish.
- I.5 There are two main aspects of planning in which the community can be involved:
- Planning Policy Documents - these guide future housing, business and other development in the District (Section 2)
 - Planning Applications - individual planning applications for development in the District (Section 3)
- I.6 For each of the above, this document sets out:
- who can be involved
 - when you can be involved
 - how you can be involved and make comments
 - what feedback we will give
 - what happens to your views in the decision making process
- I.7 As a general rule, we will always seek to:
- Use 'Plain English' and provide clear information
 - Provide opportunities for everyone to get information and get involved
 - Use involvement methods appropriate to the circumstances; and
 - Give timely feedback
- I.8 A summary of how the Statement of Community Involvement links with other community involvement initiatives is provided in Appendix 1.
- I.9 For further information on planning in West Oxfordshire visit:
- Information, guidance and policies specific to planning in West Oxfordshire www.westoxon.gov.uk/planning

- Information on planning in Oxfordshire, including the Minerals and Waste Plan¹ which covers West Oxfordshire www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/planning
- The Department of Communities and Local Government is the Government department responsible for planning. The website gives access to national planning policy and practice guidance www.dclg.gov.uk
- Information on UK planning and building regulations for the general public and professional www.planningportal.gov.uk

¹ A Jargon Buster is included as Appendix 4

2. Planning Policy Documents

The main documents, policies and studies

- 2.1 Like all local authorities, West Oxfordshire District Council is required to produce a **Local Plan** for its area. The type and coverage of plans has evolved over the years and has most recently been affected by the publication of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in March 2012 which, amongst other things, introduced new national policy guidance relating to the preparation of local plans (essentially making the process simpler). The NPPF, and the associated Localism Act 2011, also introduced a new tier of **Neighbourhood Plans** whereby local communities can prepare their own local development plans to help guide future development at the local level.
- 2.2 Figure 2.1 below shows the main documents, policies and studies which are taken into account in the development of the Local Plan. It shows how the Local Plan provides guidance to assist in the preparation of other documents and how all elements work together to help determine planning applications.

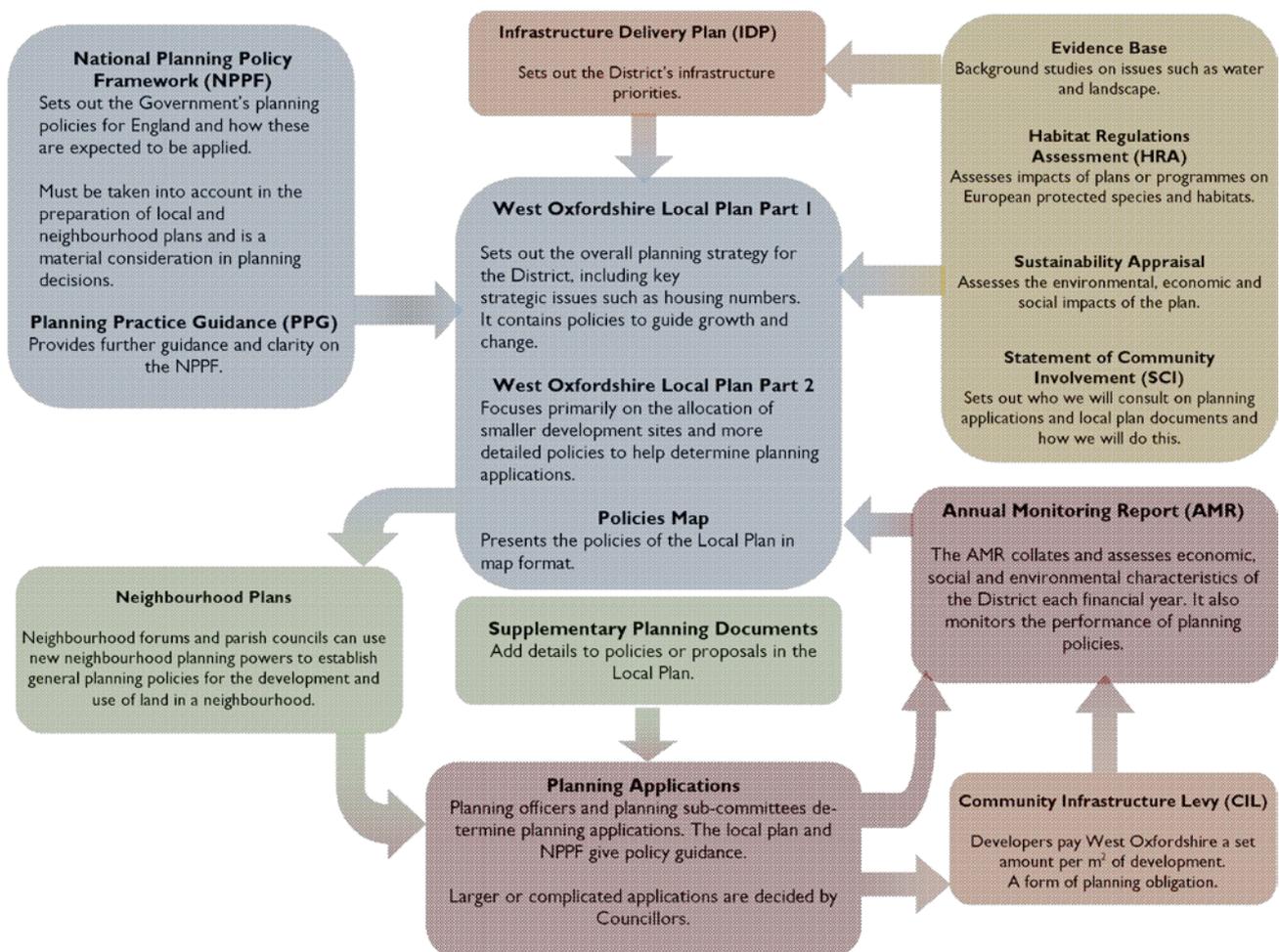


Figure 2.1 - Local Plan and its relationship to other documents

2.3 At present planning decisions are based on the saved policies set out in the adopted West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 as well as the NPPF. As the adopted plan pre-dates the NPPF the Council is preparing a replacement which will be split into two parts: **Local Plan (Part 1)** and **Local Plan (Part 2)**. Part 1 will address the overall strategy for growth, including key strategic issues such as housing and employment, and will also include large-scale site allocations. Part 2 will focus primarily on the allocation of smaller sites to help meet identified needs for housing and employment and may also include a number of more detailed policies to be used to guide the determination of day-to-day planning applications.

2.4 Figure 2.2 below sets out the main stages of community involvement in the Local Plan preparation.

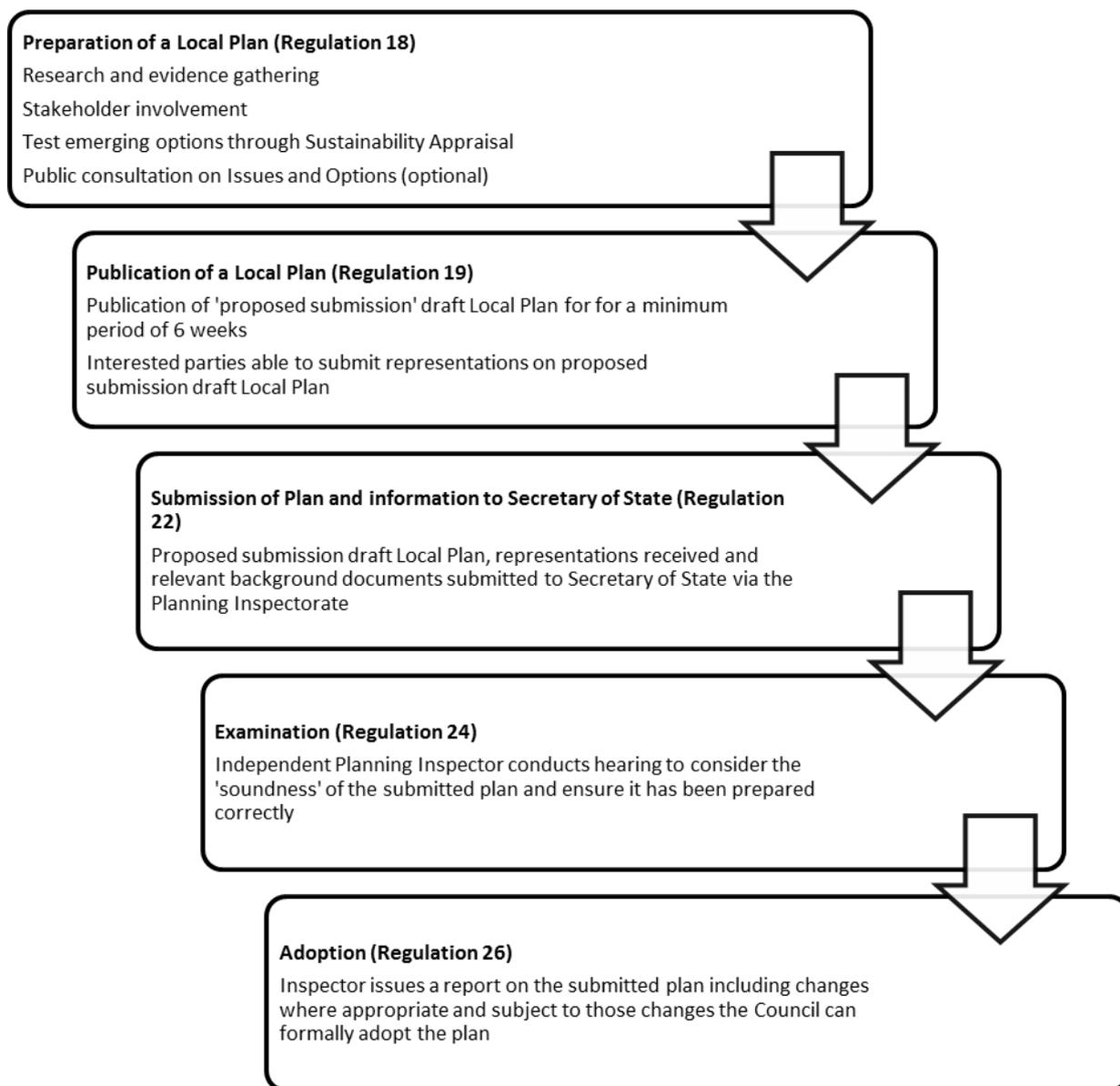


Figure 2.2 - Key stages in preparing a Local Plan

- 2.5 The Local Plan (Parts 1 and 2) will be supported by a **Policies Map** illustrating relevant policies and proposals on a geographical basis.
- 2.6 In addition to the Local Plan, local authorities can produce **Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD)** which support the Local Plan and focus on particular issues or areas such as design and affordable housing. These documents will be prepared with the involvement of the community. Often this involvement will be more targeted eg local exhibitions or workshops when drawing up a Master Plan SPD for a particular area of new development. (Figure 2.3 sets out the main stages of preparing a SPD.)

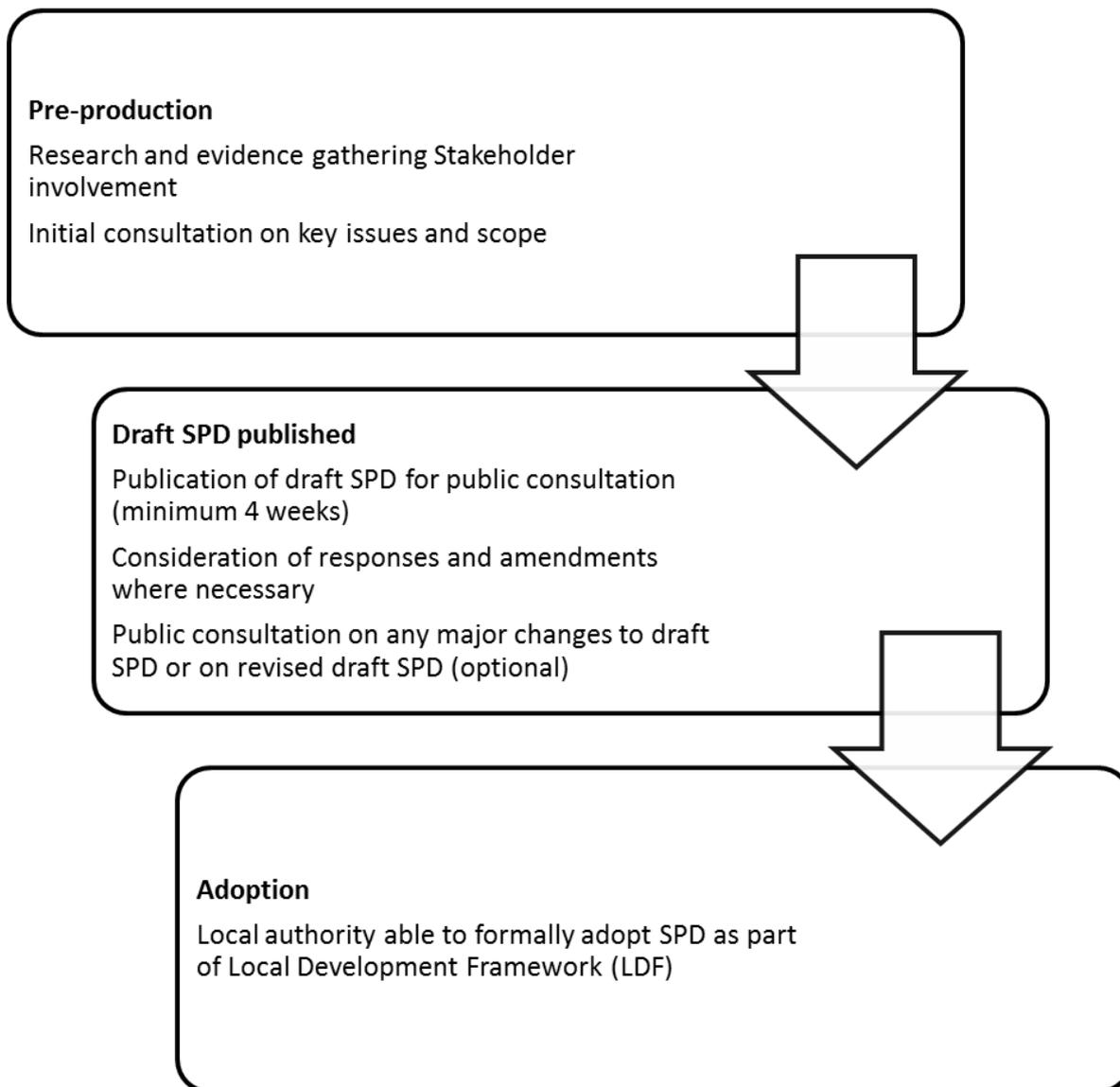


Figure 2.3 - Key stages in preparing a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)

- 2.7 Alongside the emerging Local Plan, the Council is working on a separate **Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP)** which focuses on the physical, social and environmental infrastructure that is needed to support the quantum of growth identified in the Local Plan.
- 2.8 The IDP is part of the Local Plan evidence base and will help inform the introduction of the **Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)** into West Oxfordshire. CIL is essentially a charge that may be levied on certain forms of development to help fund the majority of new and enhanced infrastructure such as roads, schools and healthcare. There are set stages of consultation

throughout the process of adopting CIL. (Figure 2.4 below outlines the main stages in preparing the CIL charging schedule.)

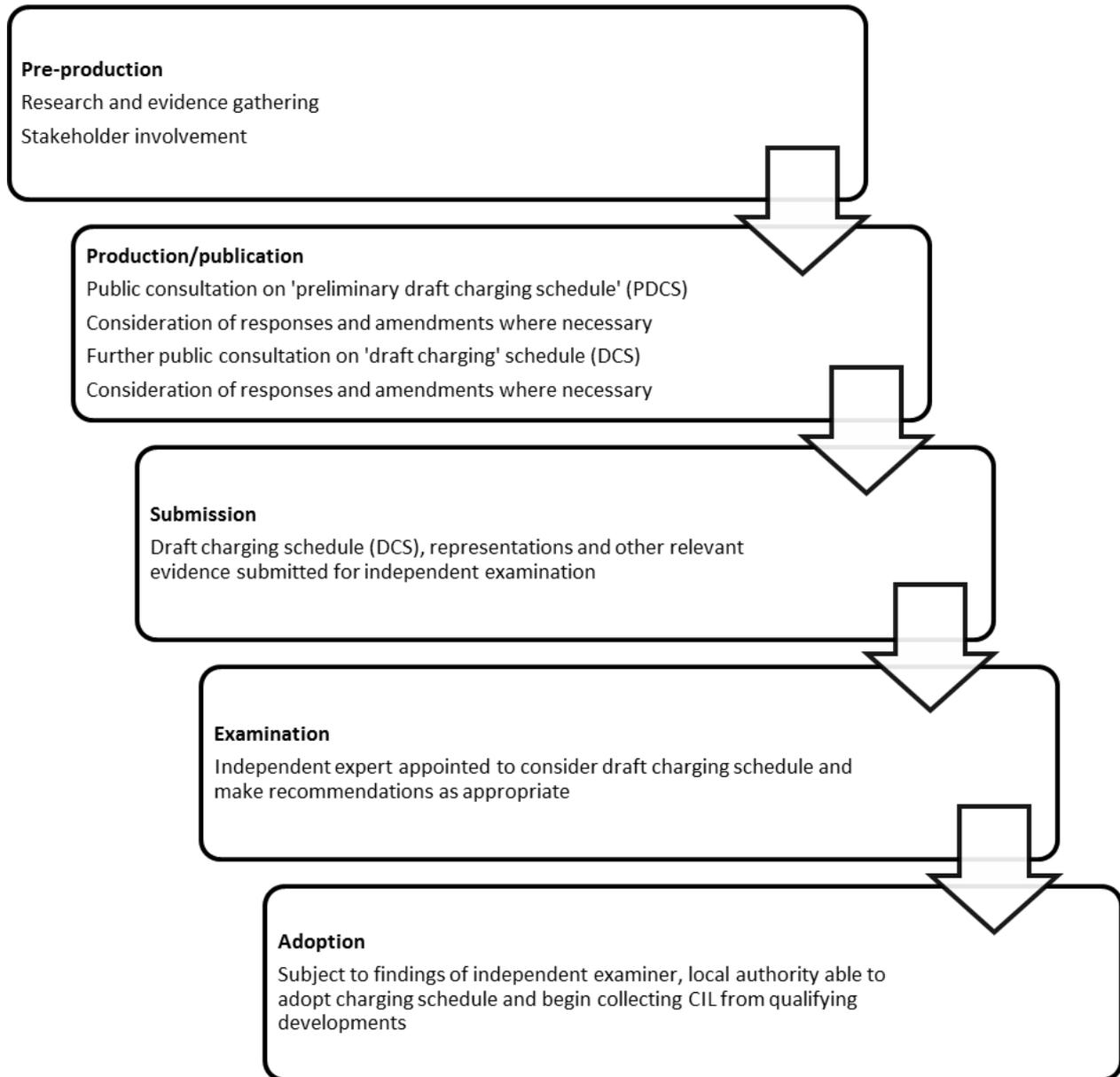


Figure 2.4 - Key stages in Introducing the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

- 2.9 The Local Plan and, in some cases, other policy documents must undergo a **Sustainability Appraisal (SA)** as part of their preparation. This is a means of assessing the potential social, economic and environmental effects to ensure plan policies and proposals reflect sustainable development principles. We will make the appraisal available for comment when we consult and involve people on proposed policies and proposals.
- 2.10 Other documents, such as the supporting **evidence base**, the **Habitats Regulations Assessment** and **Annual Monitoring Report**, are made publically available on the Council's website and used to inform the Local Plan and other policy documents. They are not subject to specific public consultation however if anyone wishes to comment they can email or write in and the Council will respond accordingly.

- 2.11 The continuing source of information on all the Council's planning policy documents is the Local Development Scheme (LDS) which is available on the Council's website (www.westoxon.gov.uk/ldf). The LDS sets out a three year rolling programme showing the intended timetable for Local Plan related documents to be prepared, making it clear when people will be able to get involved. The current LDS covers the period March 2014 to March 2017.

Who we consult

- 2.12 Anyone can be involved in the preparation of the Local Plan and planning policy documents. The hope is that by involving a broad range of people, especially early on in the process, there will be a better understanding of the issues and needs for the area by bringing together different perspectives, expertise and knowledge from local communities and stakeholders and providing an opportunity to shape and influence planning policies and future development. There are certain groups and organisations the Council must consult – statutory consultees – and others that the Council will seek to get involved.
- 2.13 Set out in the table below are the different groups that will be engaged in the preparation of the Local Plan and planning policy documents. More detail is provided in Appendix 2.

Who?	How and why?
Local People	At each stage of the process we will seek to provide information and opportunities for involvement which are accessible to local people.
Local Community and Voluntary groups	Engaging these groups is important as they can help involve more people and represent the interests of groups who may not normally get involved. Such groups may include residents associations or environmental groups. These groups may also be part of existing networks and forums such as Women's Institutes and Transition Eynsham.
Other interest groups	There are other agencies who are not statutory consultees but who represent particular interests. These groups may be national in scope but have local branches, such as Friends of the Earth and Campaign for the Protection of Rural England.
Local Businesses	Whilst we would like to involve all local businesses, the majority of businesses in West Oxfordshire are small and may have limited capacity to get involved in planning issues. We will therefore primarily seek to involve organisations which represent local business interests such as the Local Enterprise Partnership and Chambers of Commerce.
Developers and Landowners	As these groups are often critical to delivery of policies and proposals, they have an important part to play. Most developers are already engaged with the planning process and seek to be involved, particularly in identifying potential development options.
Local Service Providers	Many service providers are statutory consultees. There are some that are not, such as Thames Valley Police and local housing associations.
Statutory consultees	There are certain groups that we must involve when consulting on planning matters. These include local and national service providers and organisations, such as the Highways Authority, the Environment Agency and local Town and Parish Councils for example. Some of the latter have prepared/are preparing parish plans and Neighbourhood Plans which make a valuable contribution to the evidence base for the Local Plan and planning policy documents.

Harder to reach groups

- 2.14 Not all groups have engaged with the planning process in the past. Whilst we can not force people to get involved, where there are barriers to their involvement we will seek to remove them. The following groups have been identified in particular:

Who?	How and why?
Young people	Young people typically do not get involved but as we are planning for the future we believe there should be opportunities for young people to get involved. We will continue to seek to involve local schools and youth forums in the process and try to ensure we provide information relevant to young people which gives them opportunities to get involved.
Ethnic minorities and people with disabilities	Ethnic minorities and people with disabilities may be represented by voluntary or other organisations already on our consultation database. In addition, we will make documents available in other languages, large print and Braille when requested. Please Telephone 01993 861000. All our offices have disabled access and we will try to ensure that any community involvement events are fully accessible.
Gypsies and Travellers	We will involve the Gypsy Council and other organisations representing Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople in the plan preparation process so that they are represented.
Older people	It is recognised that some older residents may find it more difficult to get involved. We will seek to involve organisations representing the needs of our ageing population, such as Age UK



Planning Aid provides free, independent and professional help, advice and support on planning issues to people and communities who cannot afford to hire a planning consultant. Planning Aid complements the work of local authorities but is wholly independent of them. The Planning Aid website www.planningaid.rtpi.org.uk has more details on the service they provide and the relevant contact details.

When we consult

- 2.15 The statutory requirements for community involvement in the preparation of planning documents are set out in government regulations and are designed to ensure that the process is as open and transparent as possible.
- 2.16 The key stages for community involvement in the preparation of the Local Plan, Supplementary Planning Documents and the Community Infrastructure Levy have already been set out in Figures 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4.
- 2.17 To summarise, in relation to Local Plan documents there is an opportunity to be involved at the following stages:
- Preparation of the Local Plan
 - Formal publication of the Local Plan
 - Examination

2.18 In relation to SPDs, there is an opportunity to be involved at the following stages:

- Initial production/preparation
- Publication of draft SPD for consultation

2.19 In relation to CIL, there is an opportunity to be involved at the following stages:

- Initial production/preparation
- Preliminary draft charging schedule consultation
- Draft charging schedule consultation
- Examination

2.20 Further information on the timing of these different stages is set out in the Council's Local Development Scheme (LDS) the current version of which covers the period 2014 – 2017 and can be viewed online <https://www.westoxon.gov.uk/media/757994/LDS-Update-March-2014.pdf>

2.21 Getting involved at the earliest stage will provide the opportunity to influence the options as they are developed. The Local Plan and the CIL will be subject to independent examination, chaired by a Planning Inspector (or in the case of CIL, potentially another independent expert) when people will be able to speak if they have made formal comments at the relevant formal consultation stage.

How we consult

2.22 The Council must give a certain amount of publicity during the formal consultation stages including making documents available, notifying statutory consultees and advertising in the local press. In the past we have exceeded these requirements and used a number of other ways of involving the community. We will continue to do so.

2.23 The following table sets out the main preparation stages of a local plan and other planning policy documents, the minimum requirements for community involvement at each stage and also other methods of community involvement that the Council may use to complement the minimum requirements.

2.24 The Council will seek to use the best methods to complement the minimum requirements, subject to the resources available and the nature of the document under preparation. For example, some policy documents will focus on specific issues or areas and in such cases we may use more targeted methods such as meetings of people with a particular interest or expertise in an issue or area (stakeholder meetings) or exhibitions in particular areas of the District. Appendix 3 presents a summary of the advantages and disadvantages of different methods.

Local Plan Update

The Council holds a database of people and organisations who would like to be notified when we reach key stages of plan preparation. We email out a regular Local Plan Update to those on the database.

If you would like to be included on the database please register using this link:

<http://planningconsultation.westoxon.gov.uk/>

or email/call us with your name and email address planning.policy@westoxon.gov.uk
01993 861665

Duty to Cooperate

Local planning authorities, county councils and other public organisations have a duty to cooperate with one another, particularly in the plan making process. The Council will work proactively with other authorities on planning and delivering, in consultation with the Local Enterprise Partnership and Local Nature Partnership, sustainable development, especially on strategic cross boundary issues and where joint approaches/strategies are appropriate.

We will engage with our partners, such as neighbouring councils (Cotswold, Stratford-upon-Avon, Cherwell, Oxford City and Vale of White Horse), Oxfordshire County Council, the Cotswolds AONB Board, utility and infrastructure providers and government bodies, throughout the formulation of our plans.

Stage of preparation	What we will always do	What we may also do
<p>Preparation Evidence gathering/ issues and options (Regulation 18)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Notify local businesses, statutory, voluntary and special interest bodies of the subject of the local plan and invite them to say what the plan ought to contain ▪ Consultation on Sustainability Appraisal Scoping report ▪ Engage with duty to cooperate partners ▪ Take into account representations received ○ Early engagement with local communities, businesses and other interested parties ○ Press release ○ Make use of Council’s social media sites ○ Documents* available on the website and in offices^o ○ Sustainability Appraisal Scoping report available on the website and in offices^o ○ Local Plan Update ○ Notify and involve those on consultation database ○ Acknowledge and publish comments received ○ Prepare a summary of the main issues raised (including through community involvement events), set out the Council’s response to these issues and make document available on our website 	<p>Advertise in local newspapers eg Oxford Times</p> <p>Hold focus group sessions to help decide issues to be included in the plan</p> <p>Public/stakeholder meetings/workshops</p> <p>Attend Parish/Town Council meetings, particularly where they can be grouped or there is a recognised policy issue of local significance</p> <p>Roadshows/exhibitions</p> <p>Documents available in public and mobile libraries</p>

<p>Publication</p> <p>Draft Local Plan/Submission Draft Local Plan (Regulation 19)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Draft documents* published for a minimum of 6 weeks consultation ▪ Documents available on the website and in offices° ▪ Consult specific and relevant consultation bodies and other interested bodies and individuals ▪ Engage with duty to cooperate partners ○ Press release ○ Make use of Council's social media sites ○ Local Plan Update ○ Notify by email those on consultation database ○ Publish a summary of representations made, the main issues raised and how they have been taken into account 	<p>Advertise in local newspapers eg Oxford Times</p> <p>Stakeholder meetings/workshops</p> <p>Public meetings</p> <p>Attend Parish/Town Council meetings, particularly where they can be grouped or there is a recognised policy issue of local significance</p> <p>Road shows/exhibitions</p> <p>For site specific proposals notify adjoining landowners/occupier and erect site notices</p> <p>Community newsletter</p> <p>School/youth group visits</p> <p>Documents available in public and mobile libraries</p> <p>Make printed copies of the document available at a reasonable charge</p>
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<p>Submission</p> <p>Submission/Pre-examination by Inspector (Regulation 22)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Submitted Plan (and any proposed changes), along with supporting documents*, including Sustainability Appraisal, evidence base and copies of representations, available on the website and in offices^o ▪ Notify each general and specific consultation body invited to make representations of availability of documents for inspection ▪ Publish statement setting out how people were invited to make comments, who did, the main issues raised and how these issues have been addressed ▪ Give notice to those that have requested notice of submission ▪ Engage with duty to cooperate partners <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Press release o Make use of Council’s social media sites o Local Plan Update 	<p>Advertise in local newspaper where and when documents and representations can be inspected</p> <p>Pre-examination meeting (around 2 months before examination)</p> <p>Documents available in public and mobile libraries</p>
<p>Examination</p> <p>(Regulation 34)</p>	<p>6 weeks before examination:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Publish details on our website ▪ Notify people who have made representations o Make use of Council’s social media sites 	<p>Advertise in local newspapers</p> <p>Press release</p> <p>No further opportunity for other community involvement. Appearance at the examination requires a representation to have already been submitted at the publication stage (Regulation 19)</p>

<p>Examination Post-examination (Regulation 25)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Inspector’s report available on our website and in offices ▪ Give notice to those who have requested notice of the publication of the Inspector’s report ○ Make use of Council’s social media sites ○ Notify all statutory consultees, including specific and general consultation bodies, and those on our consultation database by email 	<p>Press release</p> <p>Documents available in public and mobile libraries</p> <p>No further opportunity for community involvement, unless modifications to the plan are recommended by the Inspector.</p> <p>The Inspector’s report will be binding on the Council</p>
<p>Adoption (Regulation 26)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Local Plan, an adoption statement and Sustainability Appraisal report published and made available on the website and at offices ▪ Send adoption statement to those who have requested notice of adoption ○ Make use of Council’s social media sites ○ Local Plan Update ○ Notify all statutory consultees, including specific and general consultation bodies, and those on our consultation database by email 	<p>Press release</p> <p>Documents available in public and mobile libraries</p> <p>No further opportunity for community involvement as the document content has been finalised</p>

Figure 2.5 - Community involvement in planning policy

* The documents include relevant supporting documents such as Sustainability Appraisal (SA)

° Offices include the Council’s Elmfield Office, New Yatt Road, Witney, the Town Centre Shop, Witney, and the Guildhall in Chipping Norton.

The minimum requirements (indicated above as ▪) have been summarised from those set out in the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2012. The regulation relevant to each stage is identified in the first column.

How to comment

2.25 Representations on planning documents can be made in writing or by way of electronic communications. Making use of the Council's on-line consultation portal (easily accessed through the Council's website) is encouraged as this will specify what information we need and will set out clear instructions on how to complete the form. This, in turn, should speed our understanding and analysis of comments received.

2.26 A comments form will be produced at each stage of involvement. While the use of this form through the consultation portal is preferred, the form or, failing that, a letter setting out your comments, can be emailed to us at planning.policy@westoxon.gov.uk or sent to:

Planning Policy Manager
West Oxfordshire District Council
Elmfield, New Yatt Road
Witney
Oxon
OX28 1PB

2.27 Comments must be received within the specified consultation period or they may not be able to be considered. Your comments will be public information (but your contact details will not be published).

How decisions are made

2.28 Decisions on what policies, proposals and sites are to be included in planning documents and are made by District Councillors, as advised by their planning officers. Planning policy decisions are generally taken by Cabinet and in the case of the proposed-submission draft Local Plan, Full Council. When a planning document is independently assessed at examination, the Inspector will issue a report and this may require some of the policies and proposals to be changed before the Council can formally adopt the plan.

2.29 So that Councillors are aware of the views of the local community, a summary of the comments from consultation with the local community will be presented to Councillors when decisions are to be made.

2.30 It is the Council's policy that there is no public speaking at Council meetings on the statutory planning documents process as there are other specified ways of bringing your views to the attention of the Council. Whilst the views of the community are important there may be other considerations which must be taken into account when decisions are made, such as national government policy.

2.31 The programme of Council Meetings, meeting agendas and the minutes of previous meetings are available. Visit: www.westoxon.gov.uk Email: enquiries@westoxon.gov.uk Call: 01993 861000

3. Planning Applications

- 3.1 The Council wishes to ensure that local people, groups and service providers affected by or interested in a planning application have the opportunity to comment on the proposal.
- 3.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) emphasises the importance of community involvement in planning applications. Anyone can make comments on a planning application. In some cases, the local community may be able to have a more active role in the development of proposals before an application is submitted. This section sets out how the Council will engage local communities in the determination of planning applications, including how people are made aware of planning applications, how to comment, how to find what decision has been made and how decisions are arrived at.

Note: This section of the SCI sets out the current system for dealing with planning applications and engagement. The system is, however, under review in light of a new back-office development management system which is to be introduced in autumn 2014 and the Government's recent guidance in the Planning Procedure Guidance.

A further update to the SCI will be made in due course.

Finding out about a planning application

- 3.3 Planning applications are published online. Once an application is registered, a site notice is displayed near the property/land, neighbours and statutory consultees (such the Environment Agency) are notified and local advertisement placed in the local press for major[†] or more sensitive applications. A weekly list of new planning applications is published on the Council's website.
- 3.4 Consultations are carried out with other statutory bodies and with other Council departments to obtain views on drainage, pollution, health and safety and other technical matters. The views of local or national amenity, conservation and environmental groups will also be sought where they have an interest. All new developments need access to essential services and essential service providers will be consulted on significant major applications.
- 3.5 The following table indicates the publicity appropriate for different types of planning applications, incorporating the legal requirements. The Government, through the NPPF and PPG, gives emphasis to the value of pre-application engagement by prospective applicants. Additional publicity and consultation may, therefore, be undertaken, especially where an application is of wider community interest – see section on pre-application engagement for further guidance.

[†] Major planning applications are defined as a development that involves 10 or more dwellings, or retail, commercial or industrial development with a gross floor area of 1000m² or more

Publicity and consultation for planning applications

Online Planning Explorer via Council website	✓
Neighbourhood notification letters sent*	✓
Consult statutory organisations**	✓
Consult Town and Parish Council/Meeting	✓
Display of site notice	✓
Weekly list of applications	✓
Local Advertisement (Oxford Times)	✓
Planning applications available to view online at the Planning Reception	✓ ***

* Site notices may be erected where the neighbouring owners or occupiers are difficult to identify. Minimum statutory requirements are to either erect a site notice or to notify any adjoining owner or occupier

** The Council must consult statutory bodies relevant to the proposal. These statutory bodies may include organisations such as the County Highways Authority, the Environment Agency or Natural England.

*** Most applications are advertised locally. Domestic/Householder applications which do not affect the character and appearance of a Conservation Area, the setting of a Listed Building, the setting of a Public Right of Way or are not a departure from the local plan do not require local advertisement

Website information

- 3.6 The Council's website has a range of information on the planning applications' process and guidance notes on how to make an application. The Planning Explorer allows users to search for planning applications, view details and decisions.
- 3.7 Web-users are able to access a range of information for their area, including selected planning information, using 'My West Oxfordshire' part of the Council's website. Free web access is available at public libraries.

Planning Reception

- 3.8 Planning Reception is an important source of information. Customers can obtain a weekly list of planning applications, access a range of guidance notes and view online plans.

Planning Reception is open:
Monday – Friday 9am to 5pm

01933 861420
Elmfield
New Yatt Road
Witney
Oxon OX28 1PB

How to comment on a planning application

- 3.9 Anyone can comment on a planning application. Comments should be emailed (or sent in writing) to the planning officer named on the application or to:

Head of Planning and Sustainable Communities
 West Oxfordshire District Council
 Elmfield
 New Yatt Road
 Witney OX28 1PB

Email: planning@westoxon.gov.uk

- 3.10 Please remember to quote the planning application number and site address on all correspondence and to include your name and address (and to date your correspondence).
- 3.11 Comments should be made within the specified time (normally 21 days) and will be acknowledged within one day of receipt. Bodies such as Natural England will be allowed a longer period of time to comment on applications where this is prescribed by legislation. Comments received after the deadline may not be able to be considered by the Council in determining the application. Contact the case officer to see if, in appropriate circumstances, the consultation period can be extended. (This may be possible, for instance, when the application is due to be considered by Committee and the relevant meeting is not due to take place until a week or two beyond the consultation deadline).
- 3.12 When making your comments please bear in mind that we can only take account of material planning considerations when deciding applications.

Examples of material and non-material planning considerations

We can take into account:	We cannot take into account:
National and local policies	Loss of value to the property
Planning history and previous appeal decisions	Loss of private views
Overlooking and loss of privacy	Personal disagreements
Overshadowing and loss of light	Boundary disputes
Car parking	Covenants
Traffic generation	Commercial competition
Scale of development	Construction disturbance
Conservation of buildings	Issues considered under Building Regulations
Noise and disturbance	
Character of the area	
Design, appearance and layout	

- 3.13 Comments made are added to the planning application file (although we will not include any inappropriate or offensive comments). They are public information and can be inspected and copied by visiting our offices or viewing them on our website.

How planning applications are decided

- 3.14 Planning applications are decided by one of the two Area Planning Sub-Committees (Uplands and Lowlands) or are decided by the Strategic Director (Development) or Head of Planning under delegated powers. Very occasionally the two sub-committees will combine to consider as one committee more contentious applications. The majority of householder and other minor applications are decided under delegated powers.
- 3.15 Comments will be summarised in the planning officer's report. If the application is not delegated, this report is presented to the Area Planning Sub-Committee. If comments are received after the report is produced they will be verbally reported to the committee. The Committee agenda papers are available to view five working days before the meeting.
- 3.16 We encourage public speaking by applicants, members of the public and other interested parties at the Area Planning Sub-Committee meetings. You need to have commented on the application during the consultation period and have registered to speak by midday on the Friday before the meeting. You will have three minutes to outline your views on the application; all matters raised must be relevant to planning. A leaflet setting out the procedures and guidelines for public speaking is available on our website 'Public Speaking at Planning Committee[‡]', so too one on 'Commenting on Planning Applications'.
- 3.17 Comments on planning applications are considered when applications are decided. Decisions on planning applications are based primarily on the policies and proposals in the Local Plan and NPPF. There must be exceptional reasons for reaching a decision contrary to the Local Plan and NPPF.
- 3.18 If we have received your comments on an application we will notify you of the decision within 5 working days of the decision being made. Decision notices on planning applications are available on the Council's website or from the Planning Reception.

Pre-application engagement

Applicants who intend to submit a planning application, particularly one which affects/is of particular interest to the wider community, are encouraged to go beyond the standard requirements for consultation and seek views of the wider community.* Such consultation may be in the applicant's interest in helping to resolve issues or take account of local opinion, improving the quality of the application and increasing the likelihood of success.

(* For certain developments pre-application community engagement is mandatory.)

- 3.19 Pre-application engagement can offer significant potential to improve both the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning system and improve the quality of planning applications and their likelihood of success.
- 3.20 Early involvement between developers, the community, consultees and the local planning authority allows issues and concerns to be identified, discussed and potential solutions found before planning proposals are formally submitted for assessment and decisions are made.
- 3.21 Engagement can range from developers seeking advice from the Council on their proposal to landowners/developers involving local communities in the evolution of their plans. Even minor applications can benefit from early consultation. For example, we encourage applicants to consult their neighbours before submitting an application.

[‡] <https://www.westoxon.gov.uk/media/95030/Public-speaking-at-planning-committee-leaflet.pdf>

Pre-application advice

- 3.22 Applicants are invited to seek the views of District Council Planning Officers at the pre-application stage. Information on our pre-application enquiry service, including a standard advice form, can be found on our website <https://www.westoxon.gov.uk/media/95030/Public-speaking-at-planning-committee-leaflet.pdf> Officers will be able to advise on pre-application public consultation.
- 3.23 If development proposals are likely to impact upon the functions of other organisations, such as the County Council as Highways Authority and service provider, applicants are also advised to discuss proposals with such organisations at the pre-application stage.

Community involvement

- 3.24 The Council encourages developers to consult the community prior to submitting planning applications (in line with NPPF guidance and the Localism Act). Additional consultation whether pre or post-application, should be arranged and funded by the applicant. The Council, however, may be able to assist by advising on appropriate procedures or by making material available to customers at the Planning Office or Town Centre Shops.
- 3.25 For larger applications, the Council operates a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) approach. Details of the applicable charges are available on the Council's website. A PPA is an agreement between the Council and applicants to provide a project management framework for major applications that are likely to exceed the 13-week period normally expected to be the period required to determine such applications. The PPA sets out the targets agreed by both parties for the levels and types of consultation required, information gathering process, consideration of options and agreement on design issues.
- 3.26 Pre-application involvement gives communities the opportunity to shape or influence the design and form of the development proposals. It is advisable that views of the wider community are sought at the pre-application stage, and preferably within 3 months prior to an application being submitted. The scale of consultation should be comparable to the scale, location and type of application.

Application

- 3.27 In submitting an application which may affect the wider community or is of wider community interest, the applicant should submit full details of any pre-application consultation material and also the comments received. This material will be made publicly available with the planning application.

Post-application

- 3.28 After the application has been submitted the statutory consultation and publicity procedures will prevail regardless of any pre-application consultation. If the wider community has not been consulted at the pre-application stage (or if there have been significant changes), wider community consultation is still encouraged.

Guidelines for applications consulting with the wider community:

- Prepare in 'Plain English', clear and understandable consultation material such as design concept statements, key plans and a statement of how the proposal meets planning policy considerations
- Make consultation material accessible to the local community. Displaying information on a website has an advantage in that it may be accessible to a large proportion of the community but it should not be the sole source of information
- Give adequate publicity to consultation material and events. For instance, by sending letters to local residents, businesses and organisations, advertising in the local press, or staging public exhibitions. Face to face contact may help build understanding and enable questions to be answered

- Contact local community groups, including the local Parish or Town Councils, regarding consultation arrangements as they may be able to assist and alter the local community. The Council may be able to assist in identifying local community groups
- Previous consultation on allocated sites during the Local Plan process should be taken into account and additional consultation should not consider issues agreed in adopted policy.

4. Resources and Review

Resources

- 4.1 Many of the ways we will seek to involve the local community in planning are already in use and are funded from existing budgets. However, whilst we will always meet the minimum requirements, the resources that are available may affect our ability to exceed these requirements. The approach set out in this document allows for flexibility so that the resources available can be allocated most effectively.
- 4.2 The Council may need to supplement existing staff resources when undertaking major consultation with the community. The Council may consider the use of consultants to undertake some community involvement exercises.

Review

- 4.3 The influence of community involvement on policy development will be monitored through the comments and feedback generated and through the testing of documents at the examination stage. The approach set out in this Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) purposefully includes a degree of flexibility so that community involvement best meets the needs of the community, the nature of the document and the resources available.
- 4.4 However, if issues arise which require a review of the approach, such as changes to consultation procedures or new methods of involvement, the Council will seek to make the necessary changes to the SCI.
- 4.5 The accuracy of the Local Plan consultation database will be monitored through the return of undelivered emails or returned post. Periodically the Council may review the list of consultees and invite organisations and individuals to submit up to date contact details. West Oxfordshire District Council is registered under the Data Protection Act 1988 for the purpose of processing personal data in the performance of its legitimate business. The information held by the Council will be processed in compliance with the principles set out in the Act.
- 4.6 The Annual Monitoring Report, prepared by the Council to monitor progress in preparing planning policy documents, policy implementation and duty to cooperate, will reflect on and evaluate the community involvement process.

Appendix I: Links to other Community Involvement Initiatives

The Community Strategy

The West Oxfordshire Strategic Partnership brings together a wide range of stakeholders under the shared vision of 'Shaping Futures: A Sustainable Community Strategy for West Oxfordshire'.

The partnership includes representatives of key service providers, business representatives and representatives from the voluntary and community sector. Together they produced the Community Strategy which highlights the key issues for the quality of life in West Oxfordshire and seeks ways of working together to tackle them. The planning process is an important means to enhance the quality of life in West Oxfordshire. We will seek to ensure the aims of the Community Strategy are reflected in the planning process where appropriate.

Other community involvement initiatives

In preparing planning documents, the Council will consider a range of other relevant plans and programmes, such as strategies prepared by health and education bodies, Parish Plans and other community involvement initiatives, including the working that is being undertaken in the production of Neighbourhood Plans. Relevant plans and programmes may be a consideration in decisions on planning applications but note that these decisions are primarily based on Local Plan and NPPF policies.

The Council also has a longstanding joint funding arrangement with the other rural Oxfordshire Districts to support community development work undertaken by Oxfordshire Rural Community Council which links in to the West Oxfordshire Community Strategy and the LEADER Rural Development Programme.

Appendix 2: Summary of Consultees

In the plan making process, the Council is required to consult organisations which are known as either 'specific' or 'general' consultees. In addition, the government has recently introduced a 'Duty to co-operate' in the 2012 planning regulations. Many of the consultees listed under the Duty to co-operate are already included in the list of 'specific consultees below but for completeness they are all identified separately here. Please note: as the legislation and regulations are frequently updated, the lists of consultees below may change over time and must be checked against the requirements set out in any new regulations.

Specific consultation bodies

These consultees must be consulted if the Council considers the body is affected by what is proposed in a planning policy document.

- Oxfordshire County Council and adjoining County Councils
- Adjoining Local Authorities (Cotswolds DC, Cherwell DC, Vale of the White Horse DC, Stratford-upon-Avon DC)
- Town and Parish Councils/Meetings and Town and Parish Councils/meetings which adjoin West Oxfordshire
- Environment Agency
- English Heritage
- Natural England
- Network Rail Infrastructure Limited
- Highways Agency
- Telecommunications operators
- Sewage and water undertakers
- Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Groups
- Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust
- Gas and Electricity operators
- The Homes and Communities Agency
- Thames Valley Police
- Police and Crime Commissioner
- Local Nature Partnership – Wild Oxfordshire
- Local Enterprise Partnership

General consultation bodies - examples

There are a wide range of other groups, organisations and interested individuals who, depending on the nature of the document, may be consulted. The following list sets out the types of groups who we will seek to involve and give examples.

- Local Councillors
- Nearby Local Authorities – Oxford City, South Oxfordshire District Council and Swindon Borough Council
- Local community and voluntary groups – which may include: Civic societies (eg Eynsham Society), Community groups (eg Oxfordshire Rural Community Council), Environmental groups (eg Transition Eynsham Area) and other groups representing local interests
- Wildlife and conservation groups – eg Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT), Cotswolds Conservation Board, Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE)
- Local service providers – eg Thames Valley Police, Cottsway Housing
- Local business groups – eg Local Chambers of Commerce, Federation of Small Businesses
- Developers and landowners – eg planning agents, the Home Builders Federation, defence Estates
- Ethnic minority groups – eg Commission for Racial Equality
- Disability groups – eg Oxfordshire Council of Disabled People

- Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople – eg National Gypsy Council, Showmen’s Guild of Great Britain
- Elderly/aged groups – eg Age UK
- Young people – eg local primary/secondary schools and Witney and Abingdon College
- Faith groups – eg Oxfordshire Community Churches
- Other organisations and interest groups

Duty to Cooperate: consultees (required under the 2012 Planning Regulations)

- Environment Agency
- Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England (English Heritage)
- Natural England
- Civil Aviation Authority
- The Home and Community Agency
- Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Groups
- Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust
- Office of Rail Regulation
- Integrated Transport Authorities
- Highway Authority (Oxfordshire County Council)

Appendix 3: Methods of Community Involvement

Method	Advantages	Disadvantages
Public meeting, area, town or village meetings	Open to everyone for getting information across and encouraging debate. More efficient if part of a pre-arranged external meeting – for example visits to Parish Council meeting.	Potential to be dominated by an un-representative minority. Others may be intimidated. Resource intensive, not very flexible, time limited
Stakeholder meetings/workshops, focus groups	Smaller, more managed debate, may explore specific issues in more depth, with those most likely to be affected. Smaller group may be more inclusive, may even be one to one meetings.	Resource intensive. As smaller may be less representative and more limited opportunity to get information across. Time limited.
Road shows, manned exhibitions	Can present a lot of information and present opportunities to clarify and discuss issues and receive feedback. Locations need to be accessible and may be targeted to specific areas.	Resources intensive. Time limited to set period but may be out of office hours
Un-manned exhibitions	Can present a lot of information. May be open all hours. Resource efficient.	No opportunity to clarify issues or receive feedback directly
Viewing documents at offices	Minimum requirement. Staff on hand to help clarify issues and receive feedback. Resource efficient.	Offices may be inaccessible to some. Time limited to office hours
Community newsletters (Parish Link & Creating Futures)	Potential to reach a wide audience and raise awareness. Easily digestible and can highlight further opportunities to get involved.	Limited level of detail and information. No opportunity for direct discussion
Newspaper articles	Can reach a wide audience. Minimum requirement. Reasonably resource efficient.	Can be easily overlooked among other public notices. Often limited detail and resource intensive if detail increased
Other local media (TV/Radio) Press Releases	Can reach a wide representation of the community and raise the profile of plans and proposals.	Can be easily dismissed or ignored and the level of detail in the information provided is often limited
Internet (website, social media and consultation portal)	Opportunity to present information available to wide audience (often more accessible to some hard-to-reach groups eg younger people) and at any time. Resource efficient. Analysis of responses more straight forward. Useful in providing feedback to consultation exercises.	Excludes those without access to the internet. Documents which are very large may be difficult to download

Letters	Opportunity to give information direct to specific consultees	Often limited level of detail. Relatively resource intensive which increases the level of detail
Email updates	Opportunity to give information and detail direct to identified consultees	Excludes those without access to email. Depends on email addresses being known and kept up to date
Forums	Chance to disseminate information and canvass professional opinion on key issues, and raise awareness of further opportunities	Fairly resource intensive, limited scope to consider detail
School/youth group visits	Opportunity to raise awareness with younger people and get feedback on issues that affect them	Limited scope for detail, resource intensive
Community survey/questionnaires	Useful to introduce key issues and focus on a number of key issues, opportunity for a wide coverage	Resource intensive, response may be low, limited detail

Appendix 4: Jargon Buster

Annual Monitoring Report (AMR)	An annual report which monitors and reviews the effectiveness of local policies and establishes whether policy targets or milestones for local planning policy documents set by the Local Development Scheme have either been met or progress made towards meeting them.
Community	The local community comprises of people and organisations living, working or having an interest in West Oxfordshire.
Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)	A levy allowing local authorities to raise funds from owners or developers of land undertaking new building projects in the area.
Development Plan	This includes Local Plans and neighbourhood plans. These are statutory documents that must be taken into account in determining planning applications.
Evidence base	An up-to-date information base on key aspects of the social, economic and environmental characteristics of the area, to enable the preparation of a sound plan that meets the objectives of sustainable development.
Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)	A body, designated by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, established for the purpose of creating or improving the conditions for economic growth in an area.
Localism Act	The Localism Act was published in 2011 and introduces new freedoms and flexibilities for local authorities and communities.
Local Plan	The plan for the future development of the local area, drawn up by the local planning authority in consultation with the community.
Local Nature Partnership (LNP)	A body, designated by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, established for the purpose of protecting and improving the natural environment in an area and the benefits derived from it.
Local Development Scheme (LDS)	The project plan or timetable listing the documents the Council will produce, explaining how documents will be prepared and when they will be published.
National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)	The NPPF sets out the Government's national planning requirements, policies and objectives. It is a material consideration in the preparation of local plan documents and when considering planning applications.
Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP)	A plan prepared by a Parish Council or Neighbourhood Forum for a particular neighbourhood area (made under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004).
Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)	A web-based Government resource which provides further guidance and clarity on the NPPF.
Representation	A comment or statement on a consultation document which may be in support or objection.
Sustainable Appraisal (SA)	A means of assessing the social, economic and environmental effects of a plan. Incorporates the requirements of SEA .
Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)	Where plans are likely to have significant environmental effects, a SEA is required by European Directive 2001/42/EC to assess these effects. This assessment is incorporated into a Sustainability Appraisal.
Site Allocation	A specific site where development is proposed in a plan.
Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)	A document providing additional detail to support a Local Plan. They can be used to provide further guidance for development on specific sites, or on particular issues, such as design. SPDs are capable of being a material consideration in planning decisions but are not part of the development plan.
Stakeholder	A person or group with a direct interest in a plan or proposal.